

From Paper to Mike ...to Public Eye: An Analysis of Health Reporting in Uganda's Print and Radio

Today's top story: health systems?

With several popular dailies published throughout Uganda, the newspaper is one of the country's most powerful tools for improving health. Additionally, *Uganda Health Reporter* (Vol. 2, No. 3, 2009) reported that more Ugandans get news from radio than from newspapers and television combined.

Until recently in Uganda, very few studies had been conducted on media coverage of health systems in general and of health systems research in particular. *From Paper to Mike: an Analysis of Health Reporting in Uganda's Print and Radio* conducted a critical analysis of content published in newspapers or aired on radio programs that cover health systems and health systems research, and conducted interviews with media staff and researchers.



On the beat: study methods used to gather information

Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, the analysis examined a total of 101 newspaper articles and 72 radio programs published or aired during a the randomly selected month of March, 2010. Specifically, the study:

- ◆ Analyzed health systems issues covered by the radio and print;
- ◆ Determined the extent to which content was informed by health systems research;
- ◆ Analysed mechanisms throughout which newspaper articles and radio programs were prioritized for publication; established the backgrounds of media staff that covered health issues; and
- ◆ Made recommendations on how media coverage of health systems could be strengthened.

Newspaper	Frequency	Language	Ownership	Radio	Region	Ownership
New Vision	Daily	English	Government	Radio Simba	Central	Private
Monitor	Daily	English	Private	MEGA FM	Northern	Private
Bukedde	Daily	Luganda	Government	NBS	Eastern	Private
The Observer	Bi-weekly	English	Private	Radio West	Western	Private

What are health systems?

According to the World Health Organization, "A health system is the sum total of all the organizations, institutions and resources whose primary purpose is to improve health. These include formal health services; action by traditional healers; all use of medication whether prescribed by a provider or not; home care for the sick; traditional public health activities such as health promotion and disease prevention and health enhancing interventions including road and environmental safety improvements."

Source: World Health Report 2000:

*Health Systems-
Improving Performance*

The scoop: health systems issues in the Uganda media

The study found wide media coverage of health system issues but **very little of health systems research**. The majority of the newspaper articles were on disease prevention and health promotion, followed by those on the formal health services. The study showed that journalists clearly recognize research(ers) as important sources of information, but that there was little reporting of the research findings and few articles showcased health system researchers' voices. For example, none of the radio programs recorded in March 2010 hosted health system researchers or few on health systems research as topics for discussion.



While nearly all the journalists interviewed had an interest in health reporting, few had specialized training in this specific field. Program sponsors largely determined the content of the health programs on radio while newspaper editors largely determined the health content eventually published in the paper, its prioritization and its placement.

The study posits that the limited health systems research coverage may be due to **a problematic lack of professional linkages between health researchers and media practitioners in Uganda**. However, **there are several ongoing efforts to bridge this gap** as well as efforts to strengthen the role of the media as a knowledge broker. For example, the College of Health Sciences at Makerere University has developed a communication strategy and is in the process of setting up a Communication Unit, which will strengthen the relationships between the College as a research institution and the media.

“Both journalists and researchers interviewed alluded to the mistrust that exists between scientists and the media...” (Source: *From Paper to Mike* final report).

From paper to mike: The media as a knowledge broker

- ◆ A relationship of mutual trust between the media researchers is crucial to foster knowledge sharing between these two communities. Ongoing efforts, such as setting a health sciences Communications Unit at Makerere University, address this vital issue.
- ◆ Core modules in health journalism at journalism training institutions could be implemented with the goal of increasing the number of journalists engaged in health reporting.
- ◆ With the recognition that the media is an important stakeholder in the research enterprise, health researchers must budget for its engagement in the research process, and organize interactions with journalists, editors and producers (including lots of face time!)



...To public eye: The study in the news & conferences

- ◆ The results of this research were shared in articles published in *New Science Journalism* (<http://bit.ly/evUjku>) and the *African Centre for Media Excellence* (<http://bit.ly/gouy3y>).
- ◆ The findings were also presented at the Uganda Health Journalism Conference, November 26, 2010. The presentation sparked a lively discussion among the journalists in the audience, demonstrating the need for initiatives that strengthen trust and collaboration between media personnel and researchers.

Outcome:

With the results disseminated widely in the research and media communities in Uganda, this unique project on health research journalism provoked reactions from media, journalism training programmes, researchers and decision-makers alike.

This study was carried out by a team from Makerere University. Team members consisted of Anna Ruhweza Katahoire, Esther Nakkazi, Doris Kwesiga, Hannington Muyenje and Susan Ajambo. This study received financial support from Research Matters, a collaborative Initiative between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Visit the Research Matters website at www.research-matters.net.

For more information please contact: Dr. Anne Katahoire, Makerere University, annekatahoire@yahoo.co.uk

