

Health, development communications training underway in Kenya

 By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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Media practitioners from Malawi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania will be in Kenya for six days where, among other things, they will undergo health and development communication training. The training commenced on Saturday, 25 June 2011, on health and development reporting followed by a session on computer-assisted investigative reporting at Internews in Nairobi.

The training will be followed by a health and development communication conference from 27-29 June. The media training and the conference has been organised to re-look at the challenges facing countries of the Southern hemisphere due to lack of information or poor utilisation of available information.

This situation is said to be particularly pronounced in the field of health, where basic information in areas such as public health, disease prevention, health promotion and policies on health care is not in the public domain.

Availability of information critical for social development

According to the training's concept paper, those who generate this information have limited avenues to disseminate it to the public, while those in the media with the capacity to communicate the information sometimes lack the necessary skills to access or appropriately communicate the information.

Both the training and the conference has been organised in consideration of the availability to the public of information on health which, although it is critical for social development, as it would be most useful in the public domain, or in the hands of those who provide health services to the public, it is however stored in the vaults of scholars, researchers and experts.

Journalists are expected to consider the information rich that communicates with the information poor, in a way that it becomes unnecessary barriers in terms of education, language, class, gender, culture and attitudes ensure that the skate around the near impossibility for it to reach those who need it most.

The established discrepancy has since provoked those who generate health information and those in charge of disseminating information to devise ways through which the information will reach those who need it most.

Special emphasis on health communication

Several institutions have joined hands in the training and the conference and they include Daystar University, African Population Health and Research Centre (APHRC), Internews, Population Reference Bureau (PRB), Institute for

International Journalism at Ohio University, University of Nigeria at Nsukka, the SBS Centre Communication for Sustainable Social Change (CSSC) at the University of Massachusetts, and Orbicom-UNESCO project on "Future imperatives of communication and information for development and social change".

Journalists are expected to be exposed to a combination of presentations on the theoretical underpinnings of communication with special emphasis in health communication besides sharing practical experiences in communication for development.

On the other hand, the conference brings together participants from policy formulating agencies, academic institutions, research institutions, and practitioners in the health and journalism sectors with the purpose of exploring these gaps and considering avenues through which to narrow them.

Kenya's information secretary Ezekiel Mutua opened the media training on Saturday, on behalf of the information and communications minister Samuel Poghiso.

"It is a good opportunity to have valuable discussions with health professionals and policymakers in the field of Health and Communication, with the aim of charting the way forward in strengthening the availability and access to information on health to the general public," said Mutua.

Persuasive power of mass media

Mutua said although media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues and that mass media print, television, radio and internet have an unparalleled reach as communication tool, public health professionals have always been sensitive to the persuasive power of the mass media.

"In fact public health has often had the challenging task of using the media to influence health practices while countering this same influence where it encourages unhealthy choices," he said.

The Kenyan government official hopes the training would improve on how journalists from all sectors of the news production process work within their organisations to select, shape and present health news stories.

"Learn how to understand and communicate information on health, how to ask important questions on health, how to keep the public attention focused on health, how to use electronic media such as radio, television and mobile phones, and to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter, to transmit information on health," he said.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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