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Getting Heard: HIFC strengthens communicative capacity of humanitarian NGOs by Natasha Msonza

“It is critical for development organizations to have media strategies instead of operating on ad hoc basis,” – was part of the message imparted in a media literacy workshop recently organized by the Humanitarian Information Facilitation Centre (HIFC).

Representatives from 10 humanitarian organizations convened for a media literacy two-day workshop at a Harare hotel. The main objective of the meeting was to strengthen their communicative capacity including understanding the operations of and engaging effectively with the media in strengthening their work and ability to effectively reach their audiences.

The workshop targeted press officers and individuals handling media relations in their organizations.

A rapid appraisal was conducted before the workshop to assess and determine their capacity needs in terms of dealing with

the media. Findings from this survey informed and ensured that content for the workshop was tailor made to address the identified needs. Majority of the interviewed organizations expressed various grievances concerning the conduct of the media.

The survey produced key issues where some organizations felt that the media were notorious for quoting them out of context; hence their media strategies had been reactive and not proactive, avoiding gratuitous publicity.

Others felt that the media had a general disinterest in humanitarian issues, and did not give such the space they deserve. Engaging the media in good faith often



Participants interrogate organizational media strategies

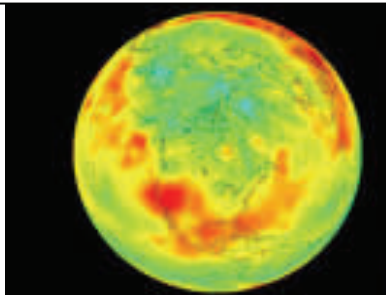
resulted in criticism and negative publicity on well intentioned projects, and the current landscape made it difficult for media to play their role without incentives.

In addressing these concerns, organizations were taken through practical steps of developing media strategies. Key observations were that organizations needed to dedicate financial and human resources to communications— **cont. Page 3**

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Sensitive vs. Sensational Journalism: Putting IDPs on the humanitarian agenda

HIFC, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recently organized a workshop for journalists seeking to give a human face to migration challenges and strengthen knowledge and reporting of issues affecting internally displaced populations (IDPs) in Zimbabwe.

Journalists attending the workshop came from a cross section of media houses, both private and public, including freelancers. They were treated to a field visit to Hatcliffe Extension – a shanty town outside Harare that developed after the 2005 Operation Murambatvina, where a lot of formally displaced citizens are being resettled with the assistance of IOM and other humanitarian agencies.

During the visit, journalists interacted with and interviewed some of the residents, and a lot of them came up with fresh story ideas from a humanitarian perspective concerning IDPs – some of which they managed to file in their newsrooms.

Jennifer Dube of The Standard Newspaper found inspiration in the plight of school going children in that area and filed this story: [Stroke victim runs crèche on \\$50 pension](#).

HIFC facilitated key sessions where journalists revisited their role in setting the humanitarian agenda, explored how to generate stories with a humanitarian focus and sharpened their interviewing techniques.



Journalists interview Hatcliffe Ext. residents

Mr Cris Chinaka of Reuters facilitated these sessions on behalf of HIFC. Journalists attending the workshop said they got more enlightened on the work of IOM and encouraged the organization to work more closely with media in getting the plight of their beneficiaries into the public domain.

HIFC currently works to strengthen cooperation between humanitarian organizations and the media by facilitating field visits, organizing spaces for interaction between the two through knowledge briefs, stakeholder meetings and communicative capacity building workshops.

It was agreed that humanitarian organizations would find value in partnering the media by arranging field visits, which would help them get objective and professional coverage of their issues. Media field visits are an effective way in which humanitarian organizations can obtain coverage of their work, giving a chance to journalists to mine and verify the issues themselves.

Some key issues from the workshop included that the humanitarian story should never be classified as overwritten or no longer newsworthy; applying creative pitching techniques and bringing the human condition to it brings fresh perspectives.

The “Them and Us” mentality between media and humanitarian organizations has made the latter sceptical about how their issues would be covered; often they feel they are quoted out



Sharpening interviewing techniques

of context – which does not help in the development of trust between the two.

Mr Chinaka cautioned the media against becoming hostages to news sources (in this case, humanitarian organizations) and said there are ways of developing cooperation, like seeking to build trust through being trustworthy for example.

Chinaka observed that humanitarian organizations were functioning in a politically repressive environment, and therefore operate within what he described as complicated ‘pressure boxes’ that limit what they can or cannot say. However, organizations would be perceived less hostile by meeting halfway with media and directing them to the right sources within their structures.

Journalists were encouraged to humble themselves to obtain maximum cooperation from sources, because they tend to ‘mystify this thing (journalism) in order to keep others outside’

Journalists encouraged HIFC to seriously consider building the capacity of ‘the sources’ themselves in effective communication. They emphasized the need and importance of organizations understanding the media and their operations as well.

HIFC highlighted that it had just had media literacy training with humanitarian NGOs and was planning to expand this in 2011.

Getting Heard *cont. from Page 1*

- media and outreach efforts because communications are just as important to the welfare of organizations as programming.

Organizations should also respond efficiently to media enquiries and have clear sources whom the media can contact.

It was also noted that increased interaction with media through developing regular contacts in media houses, facilitating field visits and timely responses to enquiries are essential to the organizations not being perceived as hostile.

It is important for organizations to have individuals handling their publicity who are experienced in media and communications.

Organizations participating in the media literacy programme included Medecins Sans Frontiers (Belgium), International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Vision International (WVI), Community Working Group on Health (CWGH), Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), Zimbabwe National Network of People Living with HIV (ZNNP+), Progressive Teacher's Union of Zimbabwe, Food Security Network (FOSENET) and the Women's Action Group (WAG).

Follow up training will review organizational media strategies and target another set of organizations operating in Zimbabwe. For the complete media strategy development document produced from the workshop, email info@hifc.info. Organizations may also send their expression of interest in future participation to the same address.

Climate Change still not on national priority list

Climate change is a serious humanitarian issue deserving public attention and action. Africa as a continent contributes only 3.4 % of total global emissions, but is the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the effects of climate change, which include frequent droughts and low crop yields among other problems.

HIFC recently convened a stakeholder consultative meeting on climate change, where key players and organizations working in this area came together with media representatives to discuss pertinent issues on the subject. The objectives of the meeting were to provide a platform enabling stakeholders and organizations working on the ground to contribute their knowledge and discuss pertinent and contemporary issues on climate change that they felt were being neglected or under-reported by the media. The meeting also sought to strengthen appreciation among media and increase the quality and quantity of stories on climate change issues.

Some of the key issues identified for consideration by the media include:

- understanding the question of financing for sustainable development for adaptation, low budgeting for this purpose by the relevant ministry
- the climate change policy arena –currently not viewed as a priority issue in the face of more urgent issues affecting communities. The Government currently pre-occupied with



Representatives of organizations discuss climate

politics does not seem to have climate change on its list of priorities.

- Lack of knowledge as a dominant factor and interrogating what the government is doing in terms of policy frameworks at international level and linking this to local processes and how all citizens can participate.
- Need to highlight more on the adaptation and mitigation success stories in communities
- The role of indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable farming methods like conservation farming which are making a difference in terms of increased productivity.
- Need to interrogate issues around carbon trading, effects of climate change on gender and women as the most affected

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Could Cash Transfers be the key to women's empowerment?

by Natasha Msonza

A new poverty-reduction intervention of giving cash to the poor is proving to be more popular than traditional forms of aid. Households have been transformed as some humanitarian assistance organisations are including cash transfers to their poverty-reduction programming in communities. Most of the recipients have embarked on income generating projects which in turn enable them to provide clothing, food and school fees for their children.

"We were so pitiful then," wistfully recalls 41 year-old Haruna Mandava (not her real name) of Mwenezi, as she described the first time in her entire existence that she held a \$1 note. That one crisp note and others to follow transformed her life. Now a small scale business woman, Haruna has ensured that her children have clothes, attend school, eat three meals a day and no longer feel the harsh treatment of bad weather as their hut has been repaired.

Despite several advances in poverty-reduction interventions, levels of poverty amongst women as a select social group have continued to rise in Zimbabwe. Humanitarian aid organizations have historically provided food aid, financed and supported small scale income generating projects, seed and other raw materials for agricultural production, among other interventions intended to assist the poor.

In recent years, microfinance has become a new favourite in Zimbabwe and has received widespread attention for its effectiveness in providing poor women more choices in fending for their families.

Worldwide, the concept of cash transfers is not an entirely new phenomenon. Recognizing the gender inequalities in the labour market that remain a barrier to their economic independence, women are the primary beneficiaries of cash transfers, which are a social protection system in which poor households receive fixed monthly cash stipends to enable spending on immediate needs.

Speaking in a session unpacking the dynamics of gender and cash transfers during a recently held Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) fair, facilitator

Nicollete Vanduursen of Concern Worldwide described the cash transfers initiative as a fresh 'software' dimension of programming. She highlighted that findings from a pilot study carried out by Concern and other PRP partners implementing cash transfers revealed that they were being well received in a shift from emergency response to a more liberating developmental approach.

"We have found that cash transfers are very effective and have been well received for the reasons that cash can be put to more creative use and gives beneficiaries wider choices. The major difference of this from emergency aid is that, you are teaching the people how to fish," said Vanduursen.

The PRP gender and women discussion also highlighted some of the positive outcomes from this initiative among which is clear evidence of its effectiveness in increasing school enrolment and retention, increased and improved household consumption and nutrition and improved well being and health care especially among women.

Despite the obvious benefits of cash transfers, a number of factors threaten the success of this outwardly good initiative. For instance, providing cash to women may be perceived as challenging the traditional patriarchal system of authority, which could see women suffer abuse at the hands of men trying to re-assert this authority. It also reinforces the stereotype about men's irresponsibility with money. **cont. on page 5**



An old couple discusses cash transfer benefits

Cash Transfers key to women's empowerment? *cont. from page 4*

In some areas, this arrangement has resulted in increased cases of domestic violence, while some women coming from collecting the cash in the villages have been waylaid and robbed. This has seen a majority of beneficiaries come up with strategies among which are the options of immediately dispensing of the money by purchasing groceries, parting with a small fraction to give their husbands in order to have some peace or simply not telling their families that they are receiving the money.

As if this was not enough, women also face challenges of currency literacy where multiple currencies are operational, while local shops on the other hand tend to inflate prices on cash distribution days.

“Cash transfers give women more choices”

What cannot be disputed though is the developmental impact the initiative has had on communities. Cash transfers have lightened the load and



Women are the main beneficiaries of Cash Transfers

given more choices and flexibility to women. They have become an important part of empowering members of communities by reducing poverty.

Humanitarian organizations offering this support would be advised to continuously work around the unforeseen effects of this otherwise worthwhile initiative.

Climate Change not on national priority list *cont. from page 3*

Some journalists highlighted one of their biggest challenges as being the need for more simplified information, noting that climate change was a technical subject.

They also said sources in the NGO sector were often not so forthcoming, and pointed out the need for them to systematically induct the media into the subject, including editors as gatekeepers to increase their appreciation of the importance of the subject.

The fact that the subject of climate change has to compete with business and politics calls for putting more effort in packaging and angling.

It was observed that fragmented NGO efforts had mainly been responsible for the lack of public dialogue on the subject. Journalists accused organizations working in this sector of not being proactive in sharing knowledge for the understanding of ordinary citizens.

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