

Kenyan NGOs Get Their Issues Aired

Angeline Siparo, Country Director for Policy Project, a Kenyan NGO, had been searching a long time for a Kenyan media outlet to tell the story of the inheritance rights of widows who have lost their husbands to AIDS. She found that journalists were often uninterested and were reporting on the issue from a narrow perspective.

In May, Angeline attended an Internews workshop on effective media relations along with five other governmental and non-governmental organization directors. Following the training, her relationship with journalists drastically changed. "Everything just fell into place for me, particularly in the case of working with radio journalists. I realize the value of assisting a journalist with finding good guests and stories and that it's important to have a news angle when you try to get a journalist to cover a particular issue."

Angeline has since participated in at least three editions of the KBC radio program "A Stitch in Time." For each program, she suggested the issues that were covered, ranging from property rights and HIV/AIDS to the lives of religious leaders who live with HIV.

HANDS ON TRAINING

The Local Voices training assisted six NGO and government officials in acquiring skills to form personal relationships with journalists, to write press releases and organize effective media events. On the final day of the workshop, they were required to organize an actual media event that was covered by Kenyan journalists.

"A Stitch in Time" freelance presenter/producer Sammy Muraya was one of four Kenyan journalists who assisted Internews staff in training. "I learned that NGOs often think that reporters are only there to point out the wrong that they do. Through this training I have been able to share with them that my passion for the fight against

AIDS is as vigorous as theirs. After the workshop I formed a warm working relationship with Angeline. Her organization has even covered my traveling costs to Kisumu for an inheritance story!"

FAR-REACHING IMPACT

For the communications director of the National AIDS Control Council (NACC), Abel Nyagwa, the workshop was "an eye opener." He said he now "realized the importance of contacting the media in time for events, and using radio as a medium to reach the majority." This has had a far-reaching impact on journalists. Anne Waithera from Radio Citizen, who also participated as a co-trainer in the workshop, said that previously it was almost impossible to arrange with the Council for a media interview. "But now things go much easier. I think the greatest benefit from the workshop for me has been that NACC now has a trained communications person who is a pleasure to work with. Abel even participated in one of our AIDS programs on a public holiday!"

DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES

Kenya Aids NGO Consortium (KANCO) project manager, Pauline Irungu, believes the training made her realize the importance of including a "strong media component" in the five year work strategy plan that she is currently compiling. Her Mombasa-based colleague, Noni Mumba, attended the training along with her. On Mumba's return to the coast, she pointed out to her colleagues that they had the "wrong approach with the media." She presented a group session on media relations after which her FHI colleagues



National AIDS Control Council Communication Director Abel Nyagwa (right) receiving his certificate from Kenyan journalist and co-trainer Sammy Muraya.

requested that she assist with individual media training sessions for their medical experts.

CREATING WORKING PARTNERSHIPS

Josaya Wasonga from the Kenyan Network of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (KENWA) says, "The journalists who were involved in the training made me realize that there is far more to journalism than meets the eye. I now understand why I need to help them with research and finding people living with HIV/AIDS to interview to explain the issue they're focusing on." Since the workshop, Josaya has accompanied two journalists to the homes of women living with HIV/AIDS to assist them in telling their stories.

The workshop is part of the Internews Network Local Voices program in Kenya and was presented with support from the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through a cooperative agreement from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). A follow-up roundtable will be held in August 2005.



For More Information:

Ron MacInnis • Internews Health Journalism Project Director • rmacinnis@internews.org • 1640 Rhode Island Ave. NW • Washington, DC 20036 • +1 202 833-5740 x304

Mia Malan, Internews Senior Resident Advisor, Kenya • +254 20 252492 • mia@internews.org

Liz Gold, Internews Network HIV/AIDS Advisor • +1 202 833-5740 x223 • lizgold@adelphia.net