

# **REPORT ON MEDIA SKILLS FOR MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GENDER AND CHILDREN TOP OFFICIALS HELD AT COURTYARD HOTEL, DAR ES SALAAM ON MAY 21<sup>ST</sup> 2004.**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) has been implementing a project called "*Publicity of the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children (MCDGC) Strategies and Activities*" which is part of a bigger project "**Institutional Strengthening of the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children.**" The project is the Ministry's initiative in partnership with the Italian government with technical support from the Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS). The project is geared towards increasing the visibility of MCDGC through the use of media to publicize various activities of the Ministry geared to promoting and protecting the rights of women and children.

The main objectives of TAMWA's undertaking are as follows:

- To publicize selected activities undertaken by the MCDGC and its top leadership in 2003 so as to increase public awareness on how the ministry is striving to promote women and children's rights.
- To produce Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials aimed at raising public debate on the need to increase the number of women in decision making as well as advocacy against gender based violence.
- To build the capacity of MCDGC on how to use media effectively to promote the image and activities of the ministry.

The implementation of the project was approved to have three phases as follows:

- i) February 2003 to August 2003
- ii) September 2003 to August 2004
- iii) September 2004 to February 2005

## **2.0 ACTIVITIES FOR PHASE TWO ( SEPTEMBER 2003-AUGUST 2004)**

Activities which TAMWA was supposed to implement in phase two were as follows:

- i) Coverage of the International Women's Day -- stories and programmes focusing on the year's theme.
- ii) Ten rounds of bang-style media coverage through press releases on the Ministry's activities.
- iii) Training of the Ministry's top officials on how to effectively deal with the media.
- iv) Two workshops for selected Ministry's staff on how to write press releases and present news to the media and how to effectively deal with the media.
- v) Production of 5,000 copies *Sauti ya Siti* Magazine (2,000 in English and 3,000 in Kiswahili)

### **3.0 Training of the Ministry's top officials on how to effectively deal with the media**

This workshop was held at Court Yard Hotel and it was attended by 15 senior officials from MCDGC including Dr. Asha Rose Migiro and Shamim Khan, the minister and deputy respectively, (*see attached participants list*).

Specific objectives and output for the workshop were as follows:

#### **Objectives**

Major objectives of the training was to:

- i. Assist participants understand the ministry's role in promoting its image to the public.
- ii. Identify gaps facing the ministry in accessing media effectively
- iii. Enable participants understand different ways of accessing media

#### **Output**

At the end of the workshop, participants were expected to be able to:

- i. Write a press release
- ii. Arrange a press conference
- iii. Write a letter to the editor
- iv. Prepare for an interview

## **Methodology**

Different methods were employed to guarantee a participatory process. Presentations were made followed by discussions, individual assignments and group work.

Soon after the introduction participants were divided into four groups and each group came up with two expectations.

- i. To know how to deal with the media
- ii. To know how the media works
- iii. To learn ethical issues in journalism
- iv. To learn how to engage the media

After facilitator gave short presentations on writing press releases, organizing press conference, writing a letter to the editor and how to conduct an effective interview three groups were formed and were given an exercise one on press conference, another writing a press release and the third group was assigned to write a letter to the editor. The aim of this exercise was to test if they were able to practice lessons on the media skills. All groups were asked to address issues of their choice but relevant to the ministry.

Presentations were done at the plenary followed by discussions where mistakes were noted, corrections were made.

To ensure that each participant understood all ingredients of effective media messaging and the essence of having 5Ws (who, when, what, why and where), participants were asked to write an introductory paragraph as testimony to what they had learnt about writing a press release. The assignment was marked and feedback was given before the end of the day.

## **Presentations:**

### **Role of the ministry in promoting its good image to the public**

This presentation highlighted responsibilities of the ministry in informing the public of its undertakings through media. The presentation explored the importance of keeping the public informed as a means of accountability.

However, it was noted that the ministry will only be able to inform the public through media if it has the following:

- i. Establish an information desk manned by a competent person

- ii. Information dissemination plan that would reach out to the media often
- iii. Managing information: the presentation suggested that there is need to have a ‘crisis team’ to give out information to case top officials are not in the office (see presentation attached).

### **Accessing media**

This presentation addressed practical issued of “how to” engage the media in fulfilling public obligations.

In this regard, the presentation imparted skills on how to:

- i. Write a press release
- ii. Arrange a press conference
- iii. Prepare for an interview (print and electronic media)
- iv. Write letters to the editor

This presentation sought to dissect the available media outlets and the theoretical as well as practical skills. In this respect, the paper identified an issue and coupled it up with real examples to give the intended meaning.

The presentation took a participatory approach where participants were asked to say how often they engaged media and the outcome. Though media engagement was minimal, the presentation helped to clear out some myths that hinder the ministry from accessing media.

### ***Writing of press release***

When writing a press release, issues of timing should be taken into consideration, for radio, send it early afternoon followed by the one to print media. This is because if the news is aired at one o’clock, it’s unlikely that newspapers will pick it because its considered stale news.

During ensuing discussions, it was considered imperative to note that the ministry only issued three press releases in 2003. During discussions, it was noted that a press release should be short, simple and concise but long enough to convey important information.

### ***Arranging a press conference***

In this session, the minister shared her experience in working with journalists; chief among them was the demand for money in exchange to publication or airing of stories. It was apparent that journalists in Tanzania

depend so much on hand outs in order to determine what is news and what is not.

During press conferences, journalists approach politicians and other leaders for money, commonly known as “mshiko”.

It was described as a hindrance to people who may want to relay important information but lack extra cash to give to journalists.

### ***Interview***

This presentation dwelt mainly on the need to be prepared in case one is facing a TV camera, radio or print journalists. It focused on the need to package information and to be well versed on the subject. Important information should be given first and emphasized through out the interview.

### ***Writing letters to the editor***

In writing a letter to the editor, it was emphasized that the ministry should monitor stories appearing in the newspapers and offers an enlightened view in case it is lacking. This was identified as a forum that can give the ministry a chance to articulate its issues and answer questions from the public.

Such myths were “the media will know even though we don’t alert them,” “journalists misquote” and “journalists don’t report even if they attend”.

To demystify these notions, the presentation demonstrated why journalists fail to report or misreport. Poor packaging of information was identified as a cause of these widely held myths.

*The presentations are attached for further and better particulars.*

## **4.0 WAY FORWARD**

### **4.1 Ministry’s commitment**

At the end of the workshop the Minister promised that they will do all they could to establish information unit in the ministry. “We have learnt that this is the way our ministry can effectively link with the public for accountability”.

## **5.0 EVALUATION**

The day ended with filling of evaluation forms which are attached here. They found the workshop useful and their remarks confirm this. But the participants thought that they should have had more time to discuss the topics.

Participants also felt that a forum should be organized bringing together journalists and senior officials to discuss way forward and correct any misunderstandings between the two parties.

## **ROLE OF THE MINISTRY IN PROMOTING GOOD IMAGE TO THE PUBLIC**

Why should the ministry promote its image to the public?

At the turn of last century, third world governments faced one challenge: proving to the public that they can measure up to the bidding. Third world governments had been described as inept and incapable of serving the public adequately.

Faced with this situation, Tanzania made the bold step of conforming to the modern era of globalization and public service reforms. The changes meant inclusion of the public and sharing of information on available programs. Embracing development, Tanzania's media has been identified as a worthy partner and institutional mechanisms put in place to guarantee its freedom. With this partnership that is bound to steer development, challenges have arisen on how information should be channeled to the public through the media. This is because the media profession has a different set of rules which need to be harmonized with those of the ministry.

### **Communal responsibility of the Ministry**

Shaping community attitudes towards something is a noble task of the ministry whose mission is promote the well being of the public. For the ministry's programmes/projects/activities to be known to the public there must be a deliberate effort to communicate with the public.

There different ways to reach out to the public but effective ways are mainstream media ( media publicity). The ministry can attract publicity if they make deliberate efforts (be proactive) to build an ally with media. If media can easily access the ministry's newsworthy information and it makes deliberate efforts to access media, then it will build a good image not only to the media but to also to the public. This is important because the media is a mirror of society. If the media knows what the ministry is doing, the public also knows about the ministry. If the ministry is invisible in the media, it is also invisible in the public.

Having adopted a proactive development stance, the government through different ministries is implementing several programmes and projects at improving quality of life among its citizens.

But to what extent does the public know about these good undertakings by the government?

However proactive the media could be in following what good things the government is doing, the public will not be fully informed unless different ministries commit themselves to do the following:

**Establish an Information desk:**

An information desk is a place in the ministry where people can access newsworthy information. For example if the Ministry has just started a new project, information about this project should be available at this desk, explaining why the project, its objectives, beneficiaries, implementation timeframe, costs involved and who covers the costs, the value the project will add to the lives of the beneficiaries and the roles beneficiaries will play in the implementation of the project.

This desk will also provide journalists with documents such as government standing orders, the law that established the ministry as well as mission and objectives. This information can be packed in an information kit.

Does the MCDGC have information desk? If yes how effective is the desk in publicizing the ministry work?

**Information dissemination plan**

The ministry needs to devise a plan on using media to disseminate information to the public. Even if the Ministry does not have a unit dealing with media issues, there is need for a media liason officer in the ministry who can provide media with valuable information.

The officer should be able to monitor and analyse media information affecting the ministry. This will enable the ministry to deliver better services to the public. The liason officer should be able to gauge the kind of questions the media is likely to pose to the Ministry. This ensures that officials are not “ambushed”.

This will enable the ministry to prepare officer to answer or to give comments where needed. This person is also the one who should design creative ways that ministry officials can employ to promote its good image to the public.

For instance, if the ministry has developed a policy affecting families, the media liason officer can advice the ministry to use an activity such as having a meeting with families in the area (DSM or any where else) and talk to them about key issues in the policy before launching the it. This kind of events attract media attention and as a result public also get informed and feel the government is close to them.

### **Managing Information**

Dealing with media very important but you need to know when, where and how information should be released especially where it happens that the ministry has received adverse publicity. Supposing something wrong has happened in the Ministry and a journalist comes to you ( say you are Director of a Unit etc) looking for information. Do not shun from the person by saying “I am not a spokes person”. What you need to do is tell him/her to go and come back after say one hour. But before the person leaves ask him/her to give you his/her telephone contacts and the contact of the media the person works for. Then quickly communicate with your boss /decision maker about the issue and get the position of the ministry. Before he comes back you are well informed about the subject and have prepare your ministry to release the information which will not damage the ministry. If the information is obtained before the journalist comes, the ministry can call the journalist or the editor of the media institution to convey that information. This will demonstrate transparency and create a good rapport with the media.

In addition, for the ministry to manage information better and build a good image to the public even during the time of crisis there is a need to have an Information Team. This could be a team senior officials from different units given mandate to speak on behalf of the ministry in case the spokesperson is not available. But all members of the team must be well informed all the time incase the media raises any questions. They must all have similar information on the issue at hand. This will build a very good relationship with the media.

## **Questions**

1. Does the ministry have information desk? How effective is it?
2. Does the ministry have media liaison office? How creative is the person in helping the ministry to engage with the public through media?
3. Does the ministry have information team (Crisis team)? Is it useful?

## **How can the ministry promote its image to the public?**

- Accountability
- To give general information
- Measure expense between public and mandate
- Minimize gap in understanding
- Show our uniqueness
- Get feedback from public
- Measure government commitments to sever public
- How to promote image
- Media publicity

### How to effect media publicity

- Knowledgeable on ministry activities
- Creativity

### Information desk (News worthy)

- Importance of communication
- P.R and communication skills and net

### Roles of Information officer

- Media monitoring

Information plan (creativity)

What information on the DIS

- Information about the ministry
- Current – up to date information

Information management (Create information team)

### **Press Release**

- Short
- Must be simple and concise
- For immediate release
- All facts in text
- Date
- Signature
- Efficient way of submitting information to the media
- Headline
- News worthy
- Punchy lead (5 W's)
- Sent in good time
- Contact further details
- Address (5 W's)

### **Press Conference**

- Timing (Deadline)
- Start on time
- Central venue
- Gathering of journalist and members of society
- Announces vital information
- Invitation a day before
- All media local and international
- Talk news in the invitation
- Speakers well informed about the subject
- Focus on the subject
- Confidence

- Write your notes/speech

### **Interview**

- Brief responses
- Be on time
- Prepare
- Question and answer
- Gives credibility to a story
- Don't read your material
- Never go off record
- Don't appear hostile
- Maintain good eye contact
- Give examples where possible
- Always answer
- Consistency
- Emphasize
- Avoid jargon
- Look your best