



COVID-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund Project Abstracts

Science Journalists and Communicators Strand



Name: Ms Nodumo Dhlamini

Institution: Association of African Universities

Country: Ghana

Project Title: Enhancing the AAU Television public health programs through quality programming and accessible media content

Project Abstract

This project aims to leverage the existing Association of African Universities Television (AAU TV) initiative to promote science engagement in Africa by strengthening the collaborations among science journalists, health journalists, communicators, higher education communities, researchers, policy makers and the general public. This project will support discussions on the state of the public health systems to deal with emerging infectious diseases, such as COVID-19 and will in addition support the development of media content on public health data that can be accessed by a wide variety of communities.

A hybrid of four models of science journalism is proposed for this initiative – namely science literacy, contextual, lay expertise and public participation. The goal of the hybrid of the four models would be to produce good science communication stories and media products that are impactful. The science literacy and contextual models would facilitate the focus on information delivery, while lay expertise and public participation would facilitate public engagement.

The project will facilitate the design, development and production of a special AAU TV Program on “the state of the public health systems in Africa to deal with emerging infectious diseases, such as COVID-19”. This program would be composed of a series of three (3) productions featuring specific themes in the areas of public health and pandemics. Carefully selected speakers and panellists would be hosted on the AAU TV – from the academia, ministries of health, social services, non-governmental sector, youth, and the public.

In addition, the grant will support the design, development, and the dissemination of diverse media content on public health data that can be accessed by a wide variety of communities.

Expected Outputs

1. Three Concept Papers for 3 TV Episodes developed
2. Three public-health related AAU TV Episodes done – resulting in three videos for wider dissemination
3. Three Radio Scripts developed for broadcasting on VOA
4. Three podcasts / voice notes developed for broadcasting via WhatsApp and other media
5. Promotional materials developed for the 3 episodes for sharing on social media
6. One virtual workshop hosted to strengthen the collaborations among science journalists, health journalists, communicators, higher education communities, researchers, policy makers and the general public;
7. One Virtual Symposium hosted to strengthen the collaborations among science journalists, health journalists, communicators, higher education communities, researchers, policy makers and the general public
8. A lively community created involving science journalist, health journalists, communicators, higher education communities, researchers, policy makers and the general public



Name: Mr. George Appiah

Institution: Centre for Science and Health Communication

Country: Ghana

Project Short Title: Media coverage of COVID-19 indigenous knowledge systems, stigma, socio-economic and political impacts in Ghana

Project Abstract

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 — the disease caused by the novel coronavirus— as a pandemic, the disease has been receiving increasing attention from media professionals and organisations in Africa and other regions. Many guidelines and resources have been published to guide media coverage of the pandemic in Africa. For example, the Global Investigative Journalism Network (<https://gijn.org/gijn-africa-reporting-covid-19/>) has listed some guidelines to aid COVID-19 coverage in Africa, West Africa or specific countries such as Ghana, the Gambia, Kenya and Uganda. However, to the best of our knowledge, none of the media reporting guidelines on COVID-19 integrates how to report COVID-19 stigma in Africa, the use and adaptation of indigenous knowledge systems to support diagnostics, prevention and treatment of COVID-19; and the socio-economic, political and cultural impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the African Media Centre for Excellence's resource "Telling the story of Covid-19 in Africa: A basket of ideas" (<https://acme-ug.org/2020/05/13/telling-the-story-of-covid-19-in-africa-a-basket-of-ideas/>) guides African journalists to report several themes including economics, labour, agriculture or governance but does not highlight the role of indigenous knowledge systems in addressing the pandemic in Africa. As African countries battle COVID-19 with innovations from indigenous knowledge systems to aid diagnostics, prevention and control of the pandemic, journalists need to let the general public become aware of them. Many people are also having challenges with food security in part fuelled by the lockdowns and the limited movements of people across communities, thus impacting negatively on the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Moreover, as more people recover from the disease, they are increasingly being stigmatised. Ghana, an African country with an estimated 31 million people, typifies the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, stigma and socio-economic and political impacts of the pandemic. First, through an innovative testing strategy, Ghana had tested 254,331 individuals as of 14 June 2020 (3), making it one of the top performing African countries in terms of testing COVID-19, according to the 11th address of the country's President Nana Akufo-Addo on 14 June 2020. Second, COVID-19 patients who have recovered and their family members are being stigmatised in their communities. Thus, some people including journalists and members of parliaments with the disease are unwilling to self-quarantine. Third, the political impacts of COVID-19 in Ghana has even become more pronounced given that the country is expected to go to the polls in December this year to elect a president and members of parliaments. There is therefore an urgent need for a science journalism

approach that integrates the use and adaptation of COVID-19 indigenous knowledge systems, fights COVID-19 stigma among the population and highlights the socio-economic, cultural and political impacts of COVID-19 in Ghana.

Expected Outputs

This engagement will enable the team to seek the perspectives of these key actors to generate information that will facilitate the creation of COVID-19 media reporting guidelines with a focus on indigenous knowledge systems, stigma, and socio-economic, cultural and political impacts of COVID-19. Using findings from the phone interviews and other resources, we will create evidence-based media reporting guidelines with a focus on indigenous knowledge systems, stigma, and socio-economic, cultural and political impacts of COVID-19 in Ghana. We will also launch small grants for 60 science journalists interested in covering indigenous knowledge systems, stigma, and socio-economic, cultural and political impacts of COVID-19. Furthermore, we will use a 3-day Zoom meeting to engage with the 60 selected journalists and train them in how to report on indigenous knowledge systems, stigma, and socio-economic, cultural and political impacts of COVID-19 in Ghana. Team members involved in this proposal have experience in training journalists in health reporting. The 60 journalists will be trained according to the selected tracts. The call for participating journalists will be advertised on social media and as press releases in collaboration with the Ghana Journalists Association. We will also monitor the outcome of the project by analysing contents of COVID-19 stories published by stipend recipients before and after receiving the stipend. Finally, we will monitor the outcome of the project by analysing contents of COVID-19 stories published by stipend recipients before and after receiving the stipend.



Name: Dr Thomas Tagoe

Institution: University of Ghana

Country: Ghana

Project Title: Empowering an integrated community of science communicators

Project Abstract

Over the last 10 years, the amount of scientific content and science related news has steadily increased in Ghana. Nonetheless, A recent publication by Kwasi Debrah (named expert on this project) describes the relationship between scientists and journalists as far from ideal. There are multiple reasons for this, with room for improvement on the side of either party. Nonetheless, the need for trusted scientific coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic presents a great opportunity. A chance to create an integrated community of scientists, journalists and science communicators working to ensure that the public stays informed with accurate and accessible science news during this pandemic and beyond. The proposed project has been designed to achieve just that, building on the institutional experience of GH.Scientific to deliver a multifaceted approach. The first approach will focus on building capacity of journalists. The founders' of GH.Scinetific have over 20 years combined experience in science communication. With this experience comes evidence-based lessons on the best practices for science communication. This experience, combined with 6 years of GH.Scienitific work in the field of science communication will be leveraged to create a training manual for journalists to build their own capacity within the field. The manual will be made available freely online, nonetheless, three training sessions will be organised to deliver the content. The first will focus on journalists and media houses within the capital region, the second will target online media platforms and the third will target media training institutes. Completion of this training program will lead to an invitation to join a newly created online platform for science communicators. The grant will support this project by paying for the creation of the online platform, additional video recording equipment, creation of the science communication training materials, video content production and translation. The training materials, network of scientists, journalists and science communicators as well as created video content, will ensure that this project has an enduring legacy far beyond COVID-19.

Expected Outputs

- Create accurate and effective communication materials around COVID-19 for public consumption.
- Create a repertoire of synthesised and accurate information surrounding COVID-19.

- Contribute towards educating the population and creating a more scientific literate country.



Name: Mrs Linet Atieno Otieno

Surname: Otieno

Institution: Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative

Country: Kenya

Project Short Title: ANTICOV Clinical Trial: Science communication and engagement to support knowledge generation and sharing around the ANTICOV clinical trial sites in 13 African countries

Project Abstract

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, serious concern was raised about the legitimacy and intentions of the clinical research community to address the pandemic in Africa. As the pandemic continues to escalate and raise concerns across the continent, the need for accurate communication and provision of information especially around planned and ongoing clinical trials grows increasingly significant.

Drugs for Neglected Diseases *initiative* (DNDi) and its partners understood early the value of using their experience in conducting collaborative R&D in the public interest, to contribute to global efforts to address the pandemic, especially in resource-limited settings in Africa, where the virus could overwhelm already under-resourced fragile health systems. Access to adapted therapies in low- and middle-income countries is vital to prevent progression of COVID-19 from mild to severe disease.

Through the ANTICOV Consortium, the Drugs for Neglected Diseases *initiative* with several African and international partners, is implementing a clinical trial to generate data on new treatment strategies in up to 3000 mild-moderate COVID-19 patients in resource-limited settings across 13 African countries. The overarching goal is to reduce the number progressing to severe forms of the virus infection requiring hospitalization, thereby relieving the burden on health care systems.

The success or failure of the planned study rests on accurate, transparent, and easily comprehensible communication by the scientists in the Consortium on the intent and progress of the ANTICOV trial. Through the ANTICOV Science Engagement and Communication Project (ASEC), DNDi plans to carry out activities to demonstrate how communication and sharing of accurate information can support knowledge generation around COVID-19 clinical trials, foster trust between the public and scientists, and highlight contributions to the COVID-19 response from Africa.

Expected Outputs

1. One training and networking session for scientists from the 13 ANTICOV clinical trial sites.
2. Radio spots and dramatized radio programmes in three Africa countries (Kenya, Uganda and Ghana)
3. Three radio shows with COVID-19 experts from three African countries (Kenya, Uganda and Ghana)
4. Content collection (photography and story collection from two ANTICOV Clinical trial sites in Africa)



Name: Dr. Charles Ongadi Nyambuga

Institution: Maseno University

Country: Kenya

Project Title: Creating an aware, and educated populace on COVID 19 pandemic through collaborative platforms for science journalist in Africa

Project Abstract

This project is under the science journalism category and is purposed to focus on media coverage of COVID 19. Kenya and the rest of the continent have lost thousands of people due to this disease thus the need for a quick intervention and awareness campaign. A number of countries in the continent have had their health systems over stretched by the disease. Despite this scenario there is a high level of ignorance about the cause and possible self-protection measures that can be undertaken by people to mitigate against the disease. This is a project that should be able to increase awareness and education of the populace on the genesis of the disease, its symptoms, and how people can protect themselves from the virus. The development of science on COVID 19 and the communication of the latest development in the area is a focal point of this study. After the project has been conducted through sensitization awareness creation and dissemination done through the mainstream media, social media platforms and a set website. The project will incorporate aspects of literature review so as to facilitate information access by science of health journalists.

Expected Outputs

This project is expected to achieve the following:

- A web site with COVID 19 Researched content that journalists can use to get news tips and features for their various media houses
- An interactive social media platform on COVID 19
- Literature covering indigenous knowledge on COVID 19 by different Researchers.
- Increased scientificated coverage of COVID-19 in the mainstream media in Kenya.

Name: Dr. Rose Mumbi Mutiso

Institution: Mawazo Institute

Country: Kenya

Project Title: Developing Public Engagement Capacity and Thought Leadership to Promote the Innovative Engagement of Early-Career African Female Researchers in Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project Abstract

Within Africa, there continues to be limited science public engagement, relegating relevant research to ivory towers that remain inaccessible to the general public and many policy makers. In Kenya, for example, research by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) found that Parliamentary Research Service staff rely on newspaper reports and government briefings rather than evidence by local academics to inform their advice to members of parliament, yet fact-checking by the PesaCheck initiative shows that local newspapers often make unsupported claims. The failure of research to permeate outside of research institutions also results in low public understanding on societal issues, and as countries across the world respond to a global public health crisis of unprecedented magnitude, the need for an informed public has never been more crucial. It is clear that more attention needs to be paid in transmitting vital research to non-expert audiences. Further, as dominant expert voices on African issues continue to be typically male—including industry, public sector, and civil society leaders—there is a competing need to ensure that the voices of African women are not marginalised in the continent's national and regional responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed project responds to these needs by strengthening the pipeline of highly trained and policy-oriented thought leaders who can employ a broad spectrum of communication skills to add to timely and credible discussions on the impacts of the pandemic on the region, informing evidence-based decision making and helping the public to better understand the big issues of the day. Specifically, we will develop a virtual training module on public engagement and science communication targeted at early-career female African researchers in fields relevant to the COVID-19 crisis. Building on an extensive track record delivering in-person science communication workshops and leveraging co-funding from existing donors, we will adapt our content to an online format that will facilitate distance learning. An interdisciplinary cohort of 25 female doctoral and postdoctoral researchers under the age of 40 and based at accredited universities in East Africa will be competitively selected to undertake the intensive online course. Given the far-reaching scope of the COVID-19 crisis, the trainees will be selected to represent a range of disciplinary perspectives including epidemiology, zoonosis, virology, public health, macroeconomics, social protection, education, and ethics. In addition, the 25 trainees will be supported through intensive media outreach activities that put their training into practice to create tangible outputs such as blogs, op-eds, podcasts, policy briefs, and other media. This project is unique in that it strengthens the supply of evidence needed to inform the region's COVID-19 responses by promoting research translation upstream at the point of research production within academia, as well as increasing demand for evidence through creative and innovative content that has broad appeal and reach among diverse African audiences. By focusing on African researchers, we also encourage uptake of homegrown evidence that is tailored to our local content for improved health and policy outcomes in the region. Finally, by providing professional development, capacity support, and platforms to young African women, this project also helps position more African women as experts and thought leaders, challenging gender stereotypes, and helping to increase women's influence in decision making spheres locally. This in turn contributes to a scientific community that is more diverse, vibrant, and reflective of the communities it serves, which is crucial for recovery in the current COVID-19 crisis, and for building resilience against future pandemics in the long term.

Expected Outputs

- Build capacity for thought leadership and public scholarship on COVID-19 among African researchers, particularly young women, making timely and locally-relevant research accessible beyond the ivory tower in the current crisis, and developing a pipeline of expert interlocutors for future crises
- Encourage public engagement with research and evidence for evidence-informed decision making by policy actors and members of society on the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increase the visibility of female researchers and experts in all spheres of society, in order to challenge stereotypes and increase women's influence in African society



Name: Mr. Aghan Daniel

Institution: Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture in Kenya (MESHA)

Country: Kenya

Project Title: Information Saves Lives: Bridging Science, Journalism and Communities for Action on COVID-19

Project Abstract

Journalists acting in the best interest of their audiences have the job of filtering messages and highlight evidence-based information to help the community to make informed decisions. Uncertainties about the Covid-19 virus has created a perfect breeding ground for conspiracy theories. Health misinformation can cause physical harm, and even death. In this project, MESHA will:

1. Mobilise local media to develop and publish information that can easily be understood by the local communities in Kiswahili, our national language, and in vernacular. A key player in this activity will be the journalists who broadcast in vernacular. These journalists reach out to the grassroots who are often ignored when it comes to health information.
2. Train scientists on how to communicate and network with the media, and link them to journalists who report on health. This will lead to a more vibrant community of scientists who are not media shy and who will be easily available to talk to the journalists who will in turn pass accurate, relevant and timely information to communities.
3. Convene Media Science Cafes (and other forums such as a week-long bootcamp) bringing together scientists, journalists, government officials (whenever possible), and civil society advocates to informally discuss a Covid-19 issue for in-depth learning.
4. Lastly, MESHA will use part of the grant to advance its own media science publishing agenda through its magazine, *Sayansi*, and website (www.meshascience.org). To be clear, articles published here are journalistic and are sometimes commissioned from leading media science writers.

Expected Outputs

- Scientists will communicate better
- Journalists will write impactful stories
- A critical mass of informed young health reporters journalists
- Improved writing skills among young health reporters with focus being on COVID-19
- An increased range of contacts for journalists
- Communities will make better decisions and take better actions
- An increased number of journalism students interested in science journalism increased number of science stories.



Name: Ms Rachel Nkhawanawo Kalera-Mhango

Institution:

Country: Malawi

Project Title: Empower to Report: Inform to Dispel: The role of community radio and social media in engaging hard to reach communities with facts and public health information during pandemic.

Project Abstract

1. Introduction

A great deal of the uncertainty about COVID-19 is linked to the misinformation that exists around the world, and Malawi is not exempted. In Malawi, the Ministry of Health with support from different institutions including WHO is the main custodian of the COVID-19 data and any evidence-based information on the pandemic, thereby making it the trusted source of information on the pandemic.

Although there has been a steady flow of latest information, scientific findings, and projections about the disease, the flow has mainly targeted the urban population rather than the rural due to the modes and channels of delivery. This has created room for misinformation and distrust among these hard-to-reach populations in so doing creating unnecessary fear and anxiety in this section of the citizenry. However, fear has been recognised as a potentially dangerous driver of behaviours that can prolong or hasten the spread of the disease. Hence the need to have more scientists, science communication and media engagement experts who are willing to go an extra mile in translating their expertise into effective communication on global concerns and anxieties.

2. Aims

The project aims at bridging the gap in the flow of information on COVID-19 between the main media outlets and hard to reach communities across Malawi through partnership with community radio stations. To achieve this, the project shall have the following as specific objectives:

- a. To build the capacity of the local media in reporting COVID-19 pandemic
- b. To improve the competence of community radios in developing media content on COVID-19 and public health in general that is accessible in hard to reach communities.
- c. To provide readily available expertise and resources for health research science information in relation to COVID-19 to community radio stations.
- d. To raise awareness of COVID-19 preventative measures in rural areas through community radio stations.

- e. To facilitate online discussions on COVID-19 and other emerging infectious diseases.

3. Methodology

The project intends to partner with the community radio stations to create and disseminate accurate and up to date COVID-19 information to the hard-to-reach communities across Malawi. By using the community radio stations not only are we going to disseminate timely and accurate information but also in their local language thereby enhancing their understanding.

The project will develop training tools and themes to increase knowledge among the rural masses on pandemics and build online collaborative platforms for science journalists and communicators in support of disseminating coordinated science communication outputs.

To ensure the community radio stations are using only credible and evidence based COVID-19 information in their programming, the project team comprising of experts in health, science communication and media engagement shall offer training to station's core

4. Expected outcomes

- a. Increased awareness, direct and indirect dialogues amongst communities, community leaders and health professionals.
- b. Increased capacity for journalists to accurately produce relevant, fact-based health research science and COVID-19 information and disseminate to the rural audience.
- c. Increased coverage of science-based information on COVID-19 and public health targeting hard to reach communities.
- d. Increased access to adaptive responses information on COVID-19 to foster positive health attitudes and adherence to preventive measures.
- e. Increased appreciation of the role that community radio stations play in engaging the public for behaviour change.

5. Conclusion

Although the project is primarily focused at reaching out to people in rural communities through community radios, the project also intends to create platforms where the experiences and lessons of working with community radio stations in reaching the disadvantaged populations can be shared.

We envisage that the skills that will be imparted to these community radio stations will be superlatively important to help them report accurately and dispel any kind of misinformation that can easily translate into behaviour change and adherence.

The project provides an invaluable opportunity for policy makers, health professional, scientists, and COVID-19 response teams to reach out to hard to reach communities with relevant information on COVID-19 based on scientific evidence.

Expected Outputs

- a. The projects intend to conduct 8 trainings in 8 community radio stations stationed in 8 districts in Malawi. Some of these community radio stations can transmit further to other surrounding districts.
- b. The training will target self-trained journalists, editors, writers, and presenters in these community radio stations.
- c. Training will also cover other areas including accessing information on the web
- d. Access to reliable and available scientists that are dedicating their time in educating Malawians on issues related to COVID-19.



Name: Ms Elizabeth Chipiliro Mkutumula

Institution: Umunthu Foundation

Country: Malawi

Project title: Moving towards a well-informed public through empowerment of health journalists in the COVID-19 era in Malawi

Project Abstract

Malawi has a population of 17.5 million people, according to the 2018 National Census Report. According to the census report, approximately, 84% of population live in rural Malawi and the rate of illiteracy is at 32%. The advent of social media (WhatsApp and Facebook) has brought about ease in information sharing, but also amplified the speed and reach of false information.

Our project aims to ensure that populations in information deserts especially those with low literacy levels can access accurate information that is simple to understand. We believe that journalists are key in bringing this about.

We plan to equip health journalist with accurate COVID-19 information that is evidence based and up to date. We also want to ensure that this information is disseminated to the public in a simplified and concise format. Furthermore, we aim to provide platforms where health journalist and the general public can easily access and fact-check information.

We aim to achieve this through the following:

1. Training sessions for health journalists
2. Radio programs on facts and myths on COVID-19
3. Modified Science cafe
4. Toll free line
5. Regularly updated Dashboard

Expected Outputs

1. Health journalists empowered with knowledge – accurate, current, region specific information on COVID 19
2. COVID-19 Online information source accessible by journalists and the general public
3. COVID-19 knowledge gaps assessed, and COVID-19 accurate information shared
4. Simplified COVID-19 information accessed by low literacy general population
5. COVID-19 Toll-free line installed, and accurate and current COVID-19 information provided to callers.



Name: Dr Kondwani Wella

Institution: University of Malawi, Kamuzu College of Nursing

Country: Malawi

Project Title: Investigating readability, understandability, and actionability of COVID-19 information materials produced by Ministry of Health in Malawi

Project Abstract

For people to benefit from health information materials, they need to be health literate. Health literacy is defined as “degree to which individuals have capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions”. Some health information materials demand higher health literacy levels than others. Health literacy demand is defined as the complexity and difficulty of health related stimulus. Health literacy demand is measured by readability, understandability, and actionability. Readability is a measure of how easy a piece of text is to read. Understandability is the extent to which consumers from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of health literacy are able to process and explain key messages. On the other hand, actionability concerns the extent to which consumers from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of health literacy are able to identify what they can do based on the information presented. Therefore, this study aims to investigate readability, understandability and actionability of COVID-19 information materials in Malawi. The study will also assess information needs of, and sources used by, health workers and general population in Malawi.

Expected Outputs

- A scoping review published in a peer-reviewed journal
- Readable, understandable and actionable information materials



Name: Dr Peter Matthews Mhagama

Institution: University of Malawi, The Polytechnic

Country: Malawi

Project Title: Capacity Building of Science and Health Journalists on COVID-19 in Malawi

Project Abstract

The project falls within Strand Two of the COVID-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund. The strand focuses on Science Engagement: Science and Health Journalists and Communicators, and seeks to support efforts to produce and disseminate coordinated science communication outputs that will allow readers access factual information to inform their actions and challenge misinformation. Science and Health Journalists are media practitioners who report on science and health issues.

At the time of preparing this proposal, there were 529 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 8003 tests conducted and 5 deaths in Malawi (Ministry of Health, 2020). This proposal provides the framework for undertaking a capacity building project of science and health journalists on COVID-19 reporting in Malawi.

The aim of the project is to develop the capacity of science and health journalists in Malawi on COVID-19 reporting and communication. To achieve the aim the design and implementation of the project was formulated based on the multi-staged approach that will combine research, development of COVID-19 communication guidelines, and training of science and health journalists in COVID-19 communication. This approach will ensure that activities of this project are evidence-based.

Expected Outputs

The project expected Outputs shall include the following:

- Inception Report
- Research/Field work Report
- Communication Training Guidelines and Messages
- Impact Evaluation Report
- Final Project Report
- Dissemination – Conferences and Journal Articles



Name: Mr Akinlabi Kazeem Jimoh

Institution: Development Communications Network

Country: Nigeria

Project Title: COVID-19: Strategic Media Engagement for Public Understanding of Scientific Research, Infectious/Non-Infectious Diseases and Development

Project Abstract

In Africa, there are fewer media content of communications that focus on key scientific and research discoveries especially in epidemic emergencies. The avalanche of fake news propagated in social media contents since the outbreak of covid-19 remains a challenge.

This project is aimed at improving public understanding of the scientific basis of health, medical science and other scientific researches on covid-19 in Africa. It would aim at educating key journalists but built around strategic media institutional engagement and partnership with leading research institutions for eventual public understanding of science and public health issues as occasioned by emerging infectious diseases.

This project will be built around a triad of strategic partners with audience composition including researchers/scientists, media institutions/journalists and civil society/media development organisations.

The strategic approach will be built around a pan African platform in science journalism -- The Africa Science, Technology and Innovations (AFRICASTI) News -- www.africasti.com.ng will be the primary platform with syndication across media organisations across the continent. Information generation will be conducted using rapid survey and key informant interview of frontline actors in COVID-19 response. Results from these interviews will be utilized in the modification of existing communication approaches for public education through several media platforms (radio, TV, social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter handle).

Activities to be carried out:

1. Survey and key informant interview of frontline actors in COVID-19 response
2. Online Science Series (Zoom Series)
3. Story Idea Development and syndication.
4. Science News Syndication (with National News Agencies and other leading media platforms)
5. Podcasts on Covid-19 and initiation of Science sound bites for Digital/Social media for platforms.
6. Africa Science/Research Forum;
7. Online training boot-camps for journalists on topical issues in Science Journalism for journalists and social media influencers; and
8. Online media skills training for scientists.
9. Cross-border story development

10. Social media Programming for trained Influencers

Expected Outputs

- Developed media content focusing on the socio-cultural experiences of the African public, for example, investigations covering stigma, discrimination, inequality and access.
- Enhanced capacity of journalists in science journalism.
- Increased media content that focuses on key scientific and research discoveries
- Substantial Story Idea Development and syndication across various online platforms.
- Increased journalists' knowledge on Science Journalism response to emerging infectious diseases.



Name: Mr Emeka Festus Odoemenam

Institution: University of Ibadan

Country: Nigeria

Project title: Media Influence on COVID-19 Reportage in African Rural Communities

Project Abstract

Consistent with the mandate of the project, the following areas will be covered:

1. Developing media content on public health data that can be accessed by a wide variety of communities;
2. Developing media reporting on the socioeconomic, political and cultural impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
3. Evaluation of media messaging, false news and audience engagement across different media channels; and
4. Building online collaborative platforms for science journalists and communicators in support of disseminating coordinated science communication outputs.

The overall objective of the project will be to make a significant difference through deliberative communication strategy in a well-planned manner with series of actions aimed at achieving certain objectives through the use of communication methods, techniques and approaches within the specified time frame of eighteen (18) months.

The communication tool to be deployed will be edutainment video and radio transmissions. The aim is to establish facts about the COVID-19 pandemic as well as debunk some false news about it. Elements of the video and radio broadcast will constitute individuals projected in a local setting who rely on someone who seems to be more educated than the rest of them for information. Unfortunately, the person (Oluko-Agba) has some wrong information about COVID-19 pandemic as well as some right information. Many of them believed him until when one of the sons (Adio) of the community who returned from school due to the closure of schools came back and began to challenge the heresy.

Communication pattern will involve the use of multimedia approach; use of television stations, radio, internet and the possibility of staging drama in some communities can be explored. The content of the video and radio broadcast will be duplicated in languages

such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin. Major characters' names will be changed based on the language of communication in a particular setting.

Expected Outputs

1. Increased media literacy on the COVID-19 virus especially in rural communities.
2. Collaboration with journalists on consistent reporting of factual information on COVID-19 in rural communities.
3. Socioeconomic data of rural dwellers visited.



Name: Dr Peter O Elias

Institution: University of Lagos

Country: Nigeria

Project Title: Giving Voice to Slums: Creating Digital Urban Platform for Community Self-Reporting Amid COVID-19

Project Abstract

The United Nations (2014) has estimated that 70 percent of urban dwellers in sub-Saharan African, including Nigeria, live in slums and informal settlements. These communities are found on fragile and undesirable locations including floodplains, wetlands, and waste dumps inhabited by the most destitute and economically vulnerable urban populations. In Lagos State, the number of slum and informal settlements has increased from 42 in 1985 to 360 in 2020 with urban population growth rate estimated at about 2.9 percent, almost twice the national rate of 6-8 percent (Salako, 2020). These slum dwellers lack opportunities for the good life and access to basic services including water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare. This deprivation in social infrastructure and basic services has made slum dwellers in Lagos State extremely vulnerable amid largely poorly uncoordinated responses to the COVID-19 (The Cable, April 20, 2020 & Business Day, April 19, 2020). Slum dwellers need a platform to share their perspectives about vulnerability and responses to COVID-19 including health behaviours and risk factors and how to change them. Thus, there is a need to create a Digital Urban Platform for open and inclusive community-led storytelling to amplify the voices of slum dwellers. This aligns with the call in 2014, the Secretary General of the United Nations indicated the need to amplify the voices of slum dwellers (UN Habitat, 2014).

Expected Outputs

The project aims to amplify slum voices by creating a digital urban platform for community self-reporting of vulnerability and response to COVID-19 in Lagos. The specific objectives include to: understand socio-economic conditions, health behaviours and risk factors which may adversely impact lives and livelihoods systems of slum dwellers amid COVID-19; mapping vulnerabilities and responses to COVID-19 pandemic in selected slum communities; developing local capacities and skills to change health behaviour and risk factors of slum dwellers amid COVID-19; and identifying community-led interventions and mechanisms for amplifying slum voices and promoting advocacy towards improved responses to COVID-19.



Name: Dr Daisy Umutoni

Institution: HealthEdu LTD

Country: Rwanda

Project Title: Science and technology engagement: Supporting public understanding of cutting-edge

Project Abstract

In December 2019, an infectious outbreak in Wuhan, China led to the discovery of the pneumonia-causing, Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and its disease, COVID-19, that would soon be declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Corona virus family is known to cause asymptomatic or mild disease in humans such as common colds, but occasionally zoonotic strains have jumped from animal reservoirs to humans causing severe disease as exemplified by SARS-CoV in 2003 and the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in 2012.

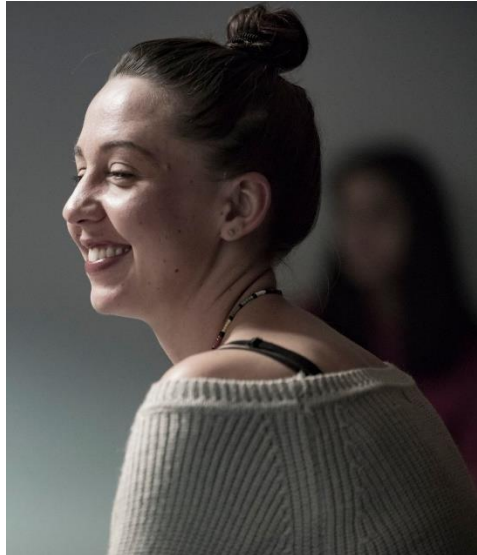
Considerable effort has been employed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic including infection prevention and control measures, candidate drugs to improve the clinical outcomes of severely ill patients and vaccine production.

Despite the promising progress towards ending the pandemic, there has been an overwhelming amount of disinformation and misinformation to the public that was termed an “infodemic” by the WHO. This wrong information prevents public involvement in limiting the spread of the virus and in creating innovative solutions.

To Counter the spread of unreliable COVID-19 related information, HealthEdu LTD (henceforth referred to as HeathEdu) science communicators comprised of PhD level Scientists, Clinicians, Public health and ICT experts, will identify and report on research studies that are sufficiently noteworthy based on well established measures of rigor and reproducibility, and that satisfy one of the following criteria: a) discovery of a mechanism(s) of disease causation; b) epidemiological assessment of disease prevalence; c) identification and/or assessment of a potential treatment, vaccine, medical device, or a novel diagnostic procedure; and d) innovative biomedical, technological, or epidemiological approaches that can be feasibly applied to diagnose, monitor prevalence, or directly tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expected Outputs

- A frequently asked questions and answers section updated monthly according to cutting-edge COVID-19 knowledge and the questions of the East African public (health professionals-inclusive), will be availed by HealthEdu experts using an already existing online platform.
- Through HealthEdu mass media partners, hard-to-reach communities will be engaged through radio and televised interviews with different experts that will engage these communities and answer their questions concerning COVID-19.
- An online collaborative platform built by HealthEdu where scientists, medical doctors, public health and ICT experts will help to verify information that may be shared with the public by regional journalists. Using this platform, Journalists will also train the HealthEdu members on how to better engage and share their knowledge with the layman.



Title: Dr Anastasia Sideris Koch

Institution: Eh!woza

Country: South Africa

Project Title: Hey Come with Us and Scrutinize (Eh!woza + Bhekisisa)

Project Abstract

We aim to combine the strengths of [Eh!woza](#), a growing public engagement NPO and [Bhekisisa](#), donor-funded media startup that specialises in in-depth health journalism. Through this collaboration we will generate media that covering three themes: news and stories that highlight the lived experience and day-to-day impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on often marginalised groups, informational messaging that describes relevant public health data and information (including around vaccines), and positive stories that highlight the work that citizens and organisations are doing to address the pandemic with a message of hope and solidarity.

Media will be accurate, relatable and responsive by combining the editorial strengths and dissemination reach of Bhekisisa with the community driven narrative, scientifically engaged and production expertise of Eh!woza. Moreover, all media will draw on important lessons gained from previous pandemics such as Ebola, Influenza, HIV and TB, which highlight that trust is key in delivering public health messages and that communities should be developed as partners in the production of knowledge so that messaging can become an antidote to stigma and misinformation.

Importantly, the work developed over the course of this grant will have a strong emphasis on training and capacity development, in order to generate a cohort of young media producers that are able to communicate and tell stories about health and disease in a situationally relevant, accurate and technically high quality way. Thus, the capacity and collaborations developed during this COVID-19 work could be applied to other areas of health and disease (e.g. TB, HIV, non-communicable diseases) that are important in South Africa and neighbouring regions.

Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of the work described above include a series of short documentary films and news stories that describe the social-cultural experiences and perspectives of local communities impacted by COVID-19. As well as uncovering how people have been impacted by COVID-19, we aim to generate media that highlights the positive work that citizens, local organisations, leaders and activists have been doing to contribute to mitigation of the pandemic and it's social impact. It is anticipated that via the collaboration

between Eh!woza and Bhekisisa, between six and twelve documentaries will be produced over the course of the grant.

In addition to documentary films describing the lived experience of people impacted by COVID-19, we aim to produce informational animations and infographics together with local artist, Mitchell Gilbert Messina, to disseminate accurate biomedical and health information in a manner that is engaging and impactful. We aim to produce at least twelve accurate and information products over the course of the grant.

Importantly, the work being done to generate the described media will form a key avenue for training and capacity development: Eh!woza's trainee cohort will produce the documentaries with guidance from Eh!woza management and the Bhekisisa team and the artist collaborator (Mitchell) will engage with trainees around messaging, semiotics and conceptual representation. Thus the development of skills around messaging, media production and dissemination, with a focus on health, will be an important additional outcome of this work.

Title: Professor Sasiragha Priscilla Reddy

Institution: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Country: South Africa

Project Title: Moving a compendium of socio-behavioural research on COVID-19 in South Africa towards broader public dissemination and effective science communication

Project Abstract

In April 2020, the HSRC launched a series of studies under the title: “Street talk/Asikhulume” with the aim of engaging with the public regarding their knowledge, perceptions, practices and attitudes in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We will use this opportunity to make the voices of those who participated in the study (50 000 (lockdown 1) and 19 000 (lockdown 2) + 7000 (healthcare workers) and 61 key informant interviews heard by sharing their experiences, fears, thoughts and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The series of studies sought to provide updated information on the social aspects of the pandemic at individual, health worker, health systems, group and institutional level. This was premised on the recognition that social science has a potential to help save lives, humanize epidemic responses, and mitigate the disruptive socio-economic and psychosocial burdens associated with outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics. Hence, social science research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture, practices and social experience of communities in disease outbreak. Therefore, considering community dynamics, is key to any health emergency response. In this way, the series of studies also sought to find ways of mitigating the concurrent epidemic of fear, panic and denial, blaming and possible stigma and prejudice. It also explored the effects of a pandemic in terms of job loss, exacerbation of poverty and inequality and created a platform to understand the context of increased vulnerability for the already marginalized, including increasing food and income insecurity under lockdown. The aim of the proposed project will therefore be to consider strategies for translating this compendium of socio-behavioural research on COVID-19 in South Africa towards broader public dissemination. Broader public dissemination of the compendium of socio-behavioural research on COVID-19 will be conducted through the development of culturally and linguistically tailored communication materials for a range of audiences that will incorporate the story of the HSRC’s response to the social-behavioural issues at the heart of COVID-19 in South Africa.

Expected Outputs

- Develop the key messages to be communicated to various audiences on different platforms by appropriately identified messengers. These key messages will also shape all the activities outlined in Development content for the HSRC website (www.hsrc.ac.za) and *HSRC Review* as necessary hereunder including the development of products.
- Develop policy briefs for dissemination to identified stakeholders and for use on various HSRC owned platforms.
- Public engagement through webinars on the findings of the research undertaken by the HSRC



Title: Dr Akwasi Bosompem Boateng

Institution: North-West University

Country: South Africa

Project Title: The Covid-19 Pandemic in Africa: Assessing Communication Strategies in Relation to South Africa and Ghana during the Crisis

Project Abstract

The *Covid-19* disease is caused by a novel severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SAR-CoV-2), which began its human infections by contact with infected wild animals in China. The Coronavirus spread from person-to-person through infected air droplets of saliva and discharges through sneezing and coughing, as well as contact with surfaces and hands that are contaminated by the virus, and touching the mouth, eyes or nose with contaminated hands. South Africa and Ghana are among the countries in Africa with the highest numbers of Covid-19 cases. The global pandemic has exposed the vulnerability, inadequacies and challenges in public health systems, compelling governments and officials in health institutions to re-assess how Coronavirus disease outbreaks are communicated and co-ordinated, especially in Africa. This project conducts a systematic review of selected published research based articles to collect and analyse data using thematic analysis. The study employs the PICOS framework to systematically review existing literature on media and communication of the coronavirus disease particularly in South Africa and Ghana. The study attempts to collate studies and empirical evidence that meet pre-specified eligibility, inclusion and exclusion criteria to address specific research questions. The systematic review method enables this study to compare the communication strategies and activities deployed by governments and health institutions in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa and Ghana.

Expected Outputs

This project seeks to produce an article (manuscript) for publication in an internationally reputed journal in communication, media or public health, which is accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training, and North-West University in South Africa.

Name: Professor Hanri Mostert

Institution: University of Cape Town

Country: South Africa

Project Title: African Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Mining Industry

Project Abstract

The SARChI Chair for Mineral Law in Africa was established in 2016 as part of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) established by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Foundation (NRF). The research focus of the Chair centres on mineral law and policy development in South Africa and across the African continent. As part of this project, mine health and safety has been a key concern, forming part of the Chair's teaching, as well as its popular science engagement. The Chair is thus well-equipped to contribute to science engagement around the Covid-19 pandemic, and in perhaps one of the most critical industries in respect of the pandemic. The histories of mining and disease in South Africa are inextricably linked, thus being impossible to discuss one without touching on the other. From the industry's infancy on the Kimberley diamond fields, which saw an outbreak of smallpox from 1883-84, to the contemporary struggle with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and silicosis,³ the industry has also been at the centre of the nation's story of disease. The nature of the migrant labour system, so crucial to the industry, has been a key part of this story, serving as a means of spread of disease from the mines to the communities from which workers originate. This link is clearly demonstrated in respect of the outbreak of Covid-19 in South Africa, with claims being made that the mining industry has become the epicentre of the disease in the country.

Expected Outputs

We want to disseminate our research to the broader public in an understandable way. This project allows us to create more opportunities for broader public advocacy and policy engagement. It is important to the Chair that its research output it produces with taxpayer money not only be available to a limited number of academics, but the public at large through effective and accessible science engagement. The Chair has a strong track record in respect of science engagement which is made available to the broader public rather than simply academics with access to paid databases. Blog posts on the website often exceed 100 views, with one piece published in 2016 in particular exceeding 14 000 views as of March 2020. These blog posts are actively marketed by the Chair's Twitter account. Furthermore, the Chair has published a number of editions of its own MLiA Occasional Papers series and contributed to the occasional paper series of the South African Institute of International Affairs. In addition, members of the Chair have contributed op-eds to major media outlets in the past



Name: Professor Elizabeth Lubinga

Institution: University of Johannesburg

Country: South Africa

Project title: Innovative Message Framing for Comprehension and Uptake of Health Crisis Communication: Fear Appeal Strategy use during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa and Namibia

Project Abstract

From 2020, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and ensuing communication has highlighted the importance of careful reflection on message framing in developing communication strategies during health crises. This research project focuses on understanding the potential impact of specific message frames and the extent to which they can enable or limit understanding and uptake. Official government communication practices regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, Namibia and many other countries globally have largely been premised on the use of fear appeal strategies as mechanisms to influence behavioural change and to combat the spread of the Coronavirus. The inherent value of this framing approach is that it is persuasive, with messages providing a high potential for uptake and influencing behavioural change for pandemic containment purposes. Of importance, too is crucial role that the media play in public health messaging, essential amplification of messages thereby creating awareness about salient issues. The project adopts a two-pronged approach: (1) analysis of fear appeal strategies and their potential effects on health-related behaviour; and (2) a critical examination of how the media amplified the messages by government and repurposed them for public consumption in the two countries as well as the capacity of science and health journalists.

Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of this project are:

- Generate a technical report
- Compile a draft policy framework for health crisis communication.
- 1 Policy Brief
- Publish 2 Journal articles in high impact peer-reviewed journals
- Training manual for science journalists and a workshop about how to report health crises.
- Media outputs such as 3 webinars, press release, social media and an article in *The Conversation*.
- Rich qualitative and quantitative data sets which will inform other projects
- Unpack capacity development needs for science and health journalists
- Newspaper coverage by science and health journalists.

Name: Professor Stephanie Burton

Institution: University of Pretoria

Country: South Africa

Project Title: Making the science around COVID-19 accessible for the benefit of our communities

Project Abstract

Science engagement is crucial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; it demands coordination and communication among multiple actors such as politicians, local authorities, the media, public health experts, and of course researchers and scientists. Through science communication, complex argument, scientific jargon and concepts are translated and made accessible to the broader public, including policymakers, who can use it for evidence-based decision-making. It also mitigates fake news and misinformation, and empowers the general public to make rational decisions, as citizens and in their personal lives. Science journalists, health journalists and science communicators inspire open communication between scientists and politicians, between scientists themselves (open science), and between scientists and society (science communication). Researchers need to make evidence-based information available to increase the understanding of different communities, and science engagement should be included in all research projects. In the COVID-19 research context of this proposed project, science engagement will be key to disseminating scientifically based information to the public in a timely manner, ensuring that there is coordinated communication of factual information from the different research groups linked to the programme. The proposed project will bring together science engagement practitioners (health and science journalists and communicators) to work with COVID-19 research teams to produce and disseminate science communication outputs that will inform multiple publics, whilst challenging misinformation.

Expected Outputs

A key focus of the project is on building a network of early career scientists who are the future science leaders in future research activities. This will include a focus on diversity of researchers and communicators from across the region (western, northern, eastern and southern Africa), in language (intentional inclusion of Lusophone and francophone countries) and gender (priority given to woman researchers). We are currently engaging with other universities in Africa to identify possibilities to engage with active research communities in order to build regional balance in the collaborative programme. A further focus is on the beneficiaries and users of the knowledge. This includes government actors, private sector, health and social protection actors, as well as communities themselves, where particular attention will be paid to women as participants.



Title: Associate Professor Lorena Núñez Carrasco

Institution: University of the Witwatersrand

Country: South Africa

Project Title: The impact of South Africa's COVID-19 Health Care Response – a Sociological Analysis

Project Abstract

The project seeks to generate an inter-disciplinary, in-depth situational analysis of the impact of South Africa's healthcare response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The project explores the factors that facilitate and/or hinder the State's response to COVID-19. It specifically gauges the effect and impact of the response on the health sector and on vulnerable communities. It investigates how and to what extent vulnerable categories of people (defined broadly as those who are immunocompromised, have co-morbidities, are malnourished, the elderly, children, the unemployed, those living in informal settlements, the homeless, the undocumented, the incarcerated, etc) are considered, engaged, catered and cared for (or not, as the case may be) through the various phases of the State's COVID-19 response. The project aims to discern what potential impact the provision of and the pandemic health response itself has on vulnerable people to further advance our understanding of the social determinants of health and health care during this time.

Broad recommendations for future health policy and practice and research into health system inclusivity and preparedness are also likely to emerge from this project. Research training, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement are key developmental objectives at the centre of this project's research design.

Expected Outputs

- Journal articles and Media publications
- Masters research as part of the Masters of Arts in Health Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand
- Training events: *"Conducting Covid-19 related research amongst vulnerable populations"* and *"Informing and Empowering. Covid- 19 and vulnerable communities"*
- Public engagements in national international events.

- Seminar with academics, government officials, policymakers, Ngo's and communities, to debate on the knowledge produced and carried out interventions.

Name: Dr Syriacus Buguzi

Institution: Medical Association of Tanzania (MAT)

Country: Tanzania

Project Title: Engaging Swahili-speaking communities to access COVID-19 factual information through the use of digital media

Project Abstract

At the very beginning of the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation emerged online regarding the origin, scale, prevention, treatment, and other aspects of the disease. Disinformation and misinformation was mostly spread through social media text messages. On February 2, the World Health Organization (WHO) described a "massive infodemic," citing an overabundance of reported information, accurate and false, about the virus that "makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it." The WHO stated that the high demand for timely and trustworthy information has incentivized the creation of a direct WHO 24/7 myth-busting hotline where its communication and social media teams have been monitoring and responding to misinformation through its website and social media pages. The WHO specifically debunked as false some claims that have circulated on social media, including the claim that a person can tell if they have the virus or not simply by holding their breath; the claim that drinking lots of water will protect against the virus; and the claim that gargling salt water will prevent infection. Facebook, Twitter and Google said they were working with WHO to address "misinformation." Besides availability of quality and reliable information in English, little effort has been done to bridge the gap of information for Swahili-speaking communities.

Expected Outputs

At least 3 recent (i.e. in the last 12 months) outputs (works) covering health, and specifically disease prevention, control, management and treatment. These could be recent published work or communication outputs by featured individual science journalists and communicators.

Name: Miss Tracy Ahumuza

Institution: Infectious Diseases Institute – Makerere University

Country: Uganda

Project Short Title: Risk communication and engagement of influencers for COVID-19 myth busting

Project Abstract

COVID-19, caused by the novel Corona Virus (SARS-COV-2), became a public health issue in China in December 2019. On 31 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and a pandemic in by February 2020. The Government of Uganda established early proactive measures for timely detection and prevention of COVID1-9, including screening of international travellers at the airport. One of the major lessons learned during public health crises in Uganda such as the outbreaks of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)), influenza A(H1N1), and Ebola virus disease – is that science journalism purely by journalists attached to media houses and political leanings, is insufficient to mitigate transmission of disease countrywide. Increasingly, with the rise of the internet and social media, journalists are required to do more in less time and with fewer resources, more so now that media institutions have had to cut costs on staffing. Innovation in community engagement is integral to the success of responses during health emergencies. The COVID-19 outbreak challenges public health systems and their ability to communicate effectively with their populations in the absence of physical without being physically present as in the past. Failure to communicate well and fast has increasingly led to loss of trust in the bodies disseminating information. Managing “infodemics” (an excessive amount of information about a problem that makes it difficult to identify a solution), builds trust in the response, and increases the probability that health advice will be followed. It minimizes and manages rumours and misunderstandings that undermine responses and lead to further disease spread. Being at the centre of the response as an organisation supporting the Ugandan Ministry of Health, gives us the opportunity to create communication strategies from our learnings while harnessing our human resource in research and capacity building. The perception of risk among affected populations often differs from that of experts and authorities. This angle of risk communication can help bridge that gap by determining what people know, how they feel, and what they do in response to disease outbreaks. Risk communication develops acceptable and sustainable interventions to stop amplification of the outbreak and ensure community members take protective measures. It is essential for, and can be deployed alongside surveillance, case reporting, contact tracing, caring for the sick, delivering clinical care, and gathering local support for any logistic and operational needs for the response.

Expected Outputs

We propose to develop and disseminate graphic images of inspiring female leaders and activists, bearing key IEC messages and quotes for COVID-19 IPC. Some of these include women journalists, comedians and radio personalities who are respected in their various communities both online and in person.

Any IEC materials developed with the influencer ambassadors will be distributed to vulnerable and marginalised communities through IDI health facilities and community health education structures and will be developed in direct consultation with national and district COVID-19 task forces of the Ministry of Health.



Name: Dr Abbas Lugemwa

Institution: Joint Clinical Research Centre

Country: Uganda

Project Title: Using science-based community engagement to fight COVID-19 through animations and film journalism

Project Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, has rapidly spread across the world since December 2019. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the arrival of a regional epidemic was delayed but is now picking up pace despite restrictive control measures put in place by governments.

The time bought by a lockdown in Uganda has only partly been used to prepare the population with education and information yet there has been a lack of palpable media participation in linking political, technical and scientific efforts to timely and correct information sharing with the general population, in part because of the challenges of organising this.

The coronavirus pandemic and restrictions employed to slow its spread has affected other areas of health care delivery, threatening targets and achievements gained so far like HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis, maternal healthcare, routine and extraordinary vaccination campaigns and other health promotion campaigns.

Our collaborative approach to science engagement and journalism aims to bridge this gap by turning evidence generated by JCRC, as well as from a wide range of other sources, into public health messaging to be circulated in Mbarara region and nationally. This will be through production of animations, small video clips for circulation on local and national media outlets and on social media platforms. Journalists in Mbarara region will be invited to write stories aimed at getting wider coverage for evidence generated and synthesized through the project.

Our work in Mbarara would then be scaled up through the Picturing Health-Joint Clinical Research Centre strong network of international collaborations across Sub Saharan Africa which for years engaged and informed the public in Uganda and beyond about major clinical trials and other policy transforming research, particularly for HIV. We will build on this alliance between research, international collaboration, frontline healthcare delivery in difficult to reach communities and health communication and journalism.

Our approach to science engagement would aim to translate scientific evidence into a two way process where key messages are developed in collaboration between researchers, community organisers, community leaders, frontline healthcare providers and health communicators/journalists. Messaging will not only explain what people and communities need to do to improve health outcomes but will also explain why.

We will report on the use and adaptation of emerging practices on the continent and internationally to support diagnostics, prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

We will develop media content. This will both be for information around COVID-19 and for wider access to healthcare affected by the epidemic like HIV/AIDS, maternal health and child health services.

Expected Outputs

Animations and Small video Clips:

These will be used by community organisers – particularly to target community leaders and other influencers, broadcast on local TV stations, circulated on whatsapp and other social media or mobile platforms.

- 1) **Short video Demonstrations will show how to look after COVID-19 patients at home** and when and how they need to seek medical attention at a treatment centre.
- 2) **A short animation about looking after patients at home.**
- 3) **A short animation aimed at mothers emphasising the importance of maternal services during pregnancy** birth and breastfeeding and of getting infants inoculated against conditions like measles. There is already a serious measles outbreak in Congo, across the border from Mbarara region. This will explain the relative risks for pregnant women compared to COVID.
- 4) **Animation aimed at people living with HIV, about the importance of collecting ART**, with a version aimed at a wider audience about the importance of knowing status and getting tested. Again it will explain relative risks for COVID and HIV.
- 5) **An Animation to explain the importance of remaining on treatment for women recently diagnosed as HIV positive during Pregnancy.**
- 6) **An animation to explain “What is a virus?”** This will use coronavirus, HIV and Ebola as examples of three different viruses, explaining how small they are and how they spread in different ways.
- 7) **An animation looking at vaccinations – how do they work.**
- 8) **An animation looking at the public health need for mass vaccinations – everyone needs to get vaccinated to create immunity in the society.**

The animations will also be used to create interest and raise awareness among journalists and other health communicators, to invite them to write stories about the science, issues and problems of these areas created by the epidemic. A lot of emphasis shall be put on how women's health has been affected by COVID-19, why we need to protect the elderly especially grandmothers for their central role in society.



Name: Mrs Veronica Mwaba

Institution: Dziwa Science and Technology Trust (DSaT)

Country: Zambia

Project Title: Establishing the relationship between media, researchers, policy and key stakeholders to highlight the significance of science engagement in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Project Abstract

Today, the world is struggling with the New Coronavirus which is devastating humans and economies. In this regard, researchers globally are working to find solutions to curb the virus. Effective science engagement among key actors in the world of COVID-19 pandemic is key for information sharing among countries to protect humans and drive positive economic development. The COVID 19: Linking Science Society to Better Lives (LSSBL) project will contribute towards communications outreach in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic and other public health issues. Different approaches will be utilised in collaboration with experts to sustain stakeholder engagement and the best practices. To achieve this, the project will be undertaken in two-fold. First, science engagement and secondly science advocacy. Ideally, the promotion aspect will focus to communicate beyond news reporting to engage key stakeholders and advocate for best practices and mobilise support for evidence-based science that could later benefit the end users to make life better. Collaboration with media, targeted audiences such as, NGO's, Science Academies, National Science and Technology Councils, Medical Associations, Academia and individual researchers will be heightened with those willing to support the science and technology agenda to contribute to socioeconomic development. In this regard, science engagement will help researchers to demystify science and find practical solutions to the pandemic. The project goal is to improve knowledge on COVID -19 pandemic through science engagement and advocacy that ultimately benefits communities.

Expected Outcomes

By 2022 , key deliverables will include;

Dedicated media platforms established to report on COVID-19/Public Health countrywide, 10 Community Radios Stations, 1 Public Media, 5 Private Media – Radio/TV, Social Media will be on going. It is hoped that by the end of the programme, the database will be established with key sources of health experts, 60 Journalists will be oriented in science engagement for effective communication. Enhanced collaboration with Zambia National Institute Public Health (ZNIPH), Science Councils, selected NGOs,

Research Institutions, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, Ministry of Community Services, networking platform established with key stakeholders and 20 journalists will be identified to report on public health.



Name: Dr Adrian Phiri

Institution: Mulungushi University

Country: Zambia

Project Title: Communication of Science and Public Health Information, Epidemiology and Management of COVID-19: Lessons learnt.

Project Abstract

In December, 2019 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was discovered in Wuhan, China and has now spread across the world and was declared a pandemic. The disease is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) presents various symptoms in infected people ranging from mild to severe respiratory illnesses, headaches, loss of taste among other symptoms. Because it is a new disease, scientists are learning more about it each day.

The outbreak of COVID – 19 has continued the globe has devastating effects on the public health of society and worst of it all has globally adversely disrupted global socioeconomic development of many nations especially developing nations. The most vulnerable have been the elderly people and those with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, cancer hypertensive among others. Globally thousands of lives have been lost, the worst being in Europe and America. Africa, with its poor public health capacity has not been spared by this pandemic.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the spread of COVID-19, can be prevented if the public adhere to public health guidelines of always masking up, sanitizing, social distancing, avoiding congested public places among other measures. To control the spread of the spread of the virus, two Statutory Instruments were signed prescribing various measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus which included wearing masks, hand sanitizing, social distancing, and isolation of COVID – 19 patients among others. Various other intervention measures have been instituted such as public awareness campaigns through various media. Despite these interventions, adherence to the guidelines still remains a challenge due to various socioeconomic factors. Thus, there is need to investigate and learn lessons on how despite measures put in place, the public are not complying with measures. The main aim of this assignment is to communicate science and public health information, lessons learnt, epidemiology and management of COVID-19. The specific questions that need to be resolved include: is the available information about COVID19 adequate? How effective are the public

awareness campaigns on COVID-19? How effective is the communication medium used? Are journalists communicating the right information to the public? What are the misconceptions about COVID-19 among the various sections in society? What best practices and lessons have we learnt on how to address COVID-19 pandemic?

Expected Outcomes

- i. Document evidence-based lessons and best practices for science communication, education and awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic in Zambia.
- ii. Interventions and experiences put in place by public health experts, scientists, researchers, activists, and leaders during the COVID -19 pandemic to reach hard to reach communities with facts and public health information.
- iii. Lessons learnt on from experiences, such as the Ebola and cholera outbreak in comparison with the managing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iv. Development of some gender sensitive media content to reach out marginalised, misinformed and disadvantaged groups and communities in informal.
- v. Conduct some dissemination programmes to share lessons learnt with policy makers, marginalised communities and academia



Name: Dr Godfrey Chagwiza

Institution: Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University

Country: Zimbabwe

Project Title: Communicating COVID-19 Knowledge, Perceptions, Attitudes and Practices in Zimbabwe

Project Abstract

Following the epidemic of the corona virus disease of 2019 (COVID 19) which has registered more than 10 million cases and killed more than 1.000,000 people world-wide, the African region so far has not been spared. Various preventive measures including total national shut down and social/physical distancing were recommended and adopted by many countries including Zimbabwe. Lockdowns have been introduced to curb the spread of the disease. Although this proved to be an effective epidemiological measure in flattening the epidemic curve, but however, the extension of the lockdown period poses further challenges to the already distressed economy and to ensuring strict compliance with social distancing guidelines. The nature of COVID-19 means that some parts of the population, particularly the elderly and the poor, and those with pre-existing conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure, have a very high risk of becoming seriously ill and eventually die prematurely. Lockdown measures among those with middle and high incomes, who can work from home, will be an inconvenience at worst. People with the resources will stock up and stay at home, and so strict measures have been popular in those groups. But for the informal sector in places without an economic safety net, or the rural and migrant poor, the measures can mean extreme hardship. Instead of staying in one place, people will start moving around more than previously in search of food, sometimes travelling large distances and potentially aggravating the epidemic. This research study will be conducted to understand how knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions and among rural communities were impacted by COVID-19. The role of social, cultural and economic factors, language preferences, source credibility, influencers and preferred communication channels in health seeking and/or risk-taking behaviours related to COVID-19 will be interrogated. To our best knowledge there is limited published literature in Zimbabwe which aimed at assessing knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) and the impact of social, cultural and economic factors towards COVID-19 among rural communities. The study will involve existing public health and community-based networks, media, local NGOs, schools, local governments and other sectors such as healthcare service providers, education sector, business, travel and food/agriculture sectors using a consistent mechanism of communication. . Findings (effects and other results) of the study will be

communicated to media through filming videos, storytelling and magazine print. Furthermore, collecting KAP surveys among at-risk populations is useful to inform prevention, control and mitigation measures during epidemics. Information from these surveys is pivotal for policymakers and program implementers to use only during the outbreak and the recovery stages and to provide basis for future similar epidemics.

Expected Outputs

Our project will focus on reporting impacts of research and evidence on those using public health services. We will particularly focus on rural populations. Our film output will target a broad audience reached by mainstream media in Zimbabwe and well as public health service users. Team members have close contacts with Zimbabwe TV and have already pitched the idea for broadcast.

The second output we produce, the public health messaging, will be primarily aimed at rural communities similar to the one which we profile. However, we are using a very simple animation style which means that it can be very easily changed and adapted to other communities in other regions or countries. Again, we should be able to achieve a very wide reach for these through internet distribution, broadcast and across platforms like WhatsApp, not only in Zimbabwe, but also in other countries.