

# Journos train in science and health reporting

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Media practitioners in Malawi underwent a science and health reporting workshop in Blantyre over the weekend, as part of an initiative by Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Trust (MLW), to equip journalists to establish health as a regular journalism beat.

The two-day workshop for editors and reporters was held at Malaria Alert Centre in Blantyre and was organised by the MLW Trust, a clinical research unit affiliated to the University of Malawi's College of Medicine and largely funded by Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom.

Communication officer for the trust, Tamara Chipasula said the workshop was organised to build the capacity of journalists to understand the procedures involved in realising health research findings on top of helping researchers to understand the process and challenges of reporting science with a bias to health in Malawi.

"We designed this seminar after noticing that there has not been much fact-based science reporting in Malawian newspapers, online, television and radio," she said.

## Accuracy of facts in health and science reporting

Mac Mallewa, a paediatric neurologist, told journalists that accuracy and clear articulation of facts are a must in health and science reporting.

"Apart from capacity building, the workshop was also organised to help researchers understand the processes and challenges of science reporting," he said.

Mallewa said it will also empower journalists to understand the basic research process, science terminology besides assisting researchers in pitching research findings worth publishing to journalists.

"The biggest challenge in reporting health has been negative perceptions held by both parties which have hopefully been cleared by the workshop," he said.

This is due to a lack of basic health research information for use by the media and also lack of trust between journalists and health researchers.

"Time has come for the journalists to establish health as a regular journalism beat for the benefit of ordinary people," quipped Prof. Malcolm Molyneux of the College of Medicine.

"My humble plea to editors, therefore, is to dedicate space and time to health issues for more and sustained coverage," said Molyneux.

## Facilitators

The workshop was facilitated by two media trainers. Edward Chitsulo, a University of Malawi part-time journalism lecturer and managing editor for Nation Publications Limited; and Levi Zeleza Manda, a senior lecturer, researcher and journalism author.

Manda said the workshop has been very beneficial to both parties because the media can now report with a better understanding of health and sciences issues. He said the trust did research on why there seemed to be a lot of challenges in health reporting.

"They found out that there was not much understanding and because of this, health was not given priority," he said.

Manda explained that the study also revealed that there has been a lack of training in this area and this is why the training is given.

"The strength of this training is that it has brought all parties involved and together they have highlighted key issues," he said.

Manda said although the workshop was just about the basics, he encouraged media practitioners to look for more as there are training opportunities out there that can take the journalist deeper into health.

## ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE: @KALIPOCHI

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

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