

Journos train to make news out of numbers

 By [Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi](#)

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Around twenty journalists completed a daylong training course in Lilongwe, Malawi on Friday 11 November 2011, where they learnt skills to turn data and numbers into news stories. The training, funded by the Hewlett Foundation through the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), enables journalists to use research and data to find and strengthen stories.

Media consultant and training facilitator, Rob Jamieson told Bizcommunity that the training was organised to refresh journalists math skills to ensure that they are proficient.

"Which includes knowing how to calculate percentages, work with fractions, and use ratios to compare numbers meaningfully," he said.

Jamieson, one of the first Malawians to establish an independent newspaper in the country's second republic in 1994, said the training was also to teach journalists on how to read charts and graphs so that they can better translate research findings into terms that readers, listeners and viewers can understand.

"We are training the practitioners so that they can ably understand how research can influence policy making and the role they can play in that process," Jamieson said.

At the training, journalists went through exercises where they managed to use research and data to find and strengthen stories. They also underwent tests on how to calculate percentages and perform basic math skills as well as comparing numbers meaningfully by using ratios.

Thokozani Chenjezi, a journalist at Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL), after the training said he was now able to read charts and graphs as well as interpret the data to either create a story idea or write stories out of it.

"I am now able to translate research findings into terms that readers cannot only understand but learn something as well," Chenjezi said.

He said he can now do story pieces that can present research findings in a way that that shows readers the importance and relevance of such findings.

Chief statistician for the country's National Statistics Office (NSO), Angela Msosa introduced the journalists to population statistics and how they can understand it for better journalism. She presented the 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey and challenged journalists to use it to come up with numerous stories.

Lead facilitator, Pushpa Jamieson challenged the journalists to show the world that they have acquired new skills by writing stories that will bring positive change.

"You have to take it out there," she said. "You are the agenda setters. If you do not write anything, then know that you'll be doing a disservice to your country."

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. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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