

Making Development Newsworthy

**Bridging the information gaps to improve the coverage
of business issues in the Ugandan mass media**

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Basic premise of the work of ILO FIT SEMA in bridging the information gap.

- **The Ugandan mass media does not cover private sector development, including financial issues, well.**
- **This is due to weaknesses within the Ugandan media itself.**
- **But it is also due to weaknesses in the way the development industry links to and utilizes the media.**

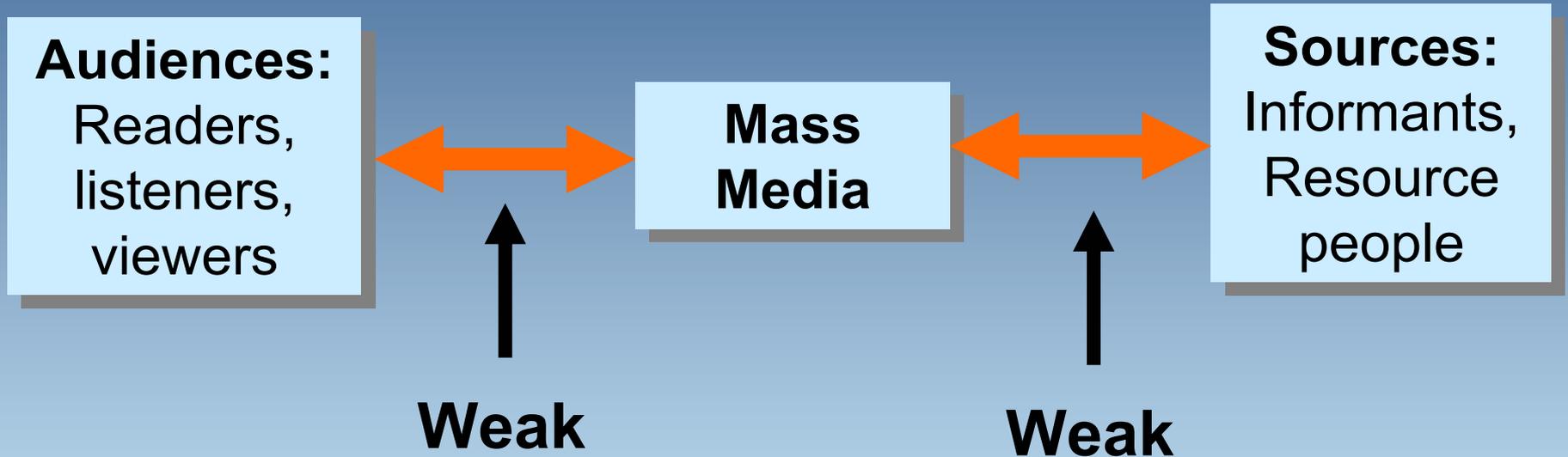
Proof

- **Anecdotal: Reading newspapers, listening to radio, watching TV, talking to media consumers etc.**
- **Survey (30 development professionals and 25 senior and experienced media professionals)**
 - **75% of development professionals rated the Ugandan media as not professional.**
 - **85% of development professionals stated that the media covered development issues poorly or very poorly.**
 - **80% of development professionals stated their agency/organisation had been misquoted or misrepresented in the Ugandan media.**

Proof (continued)

- 48% of media professionals stated that development was not effective at using the media in their work.**
- 80% of media professionals stated that few or very few of the press releases from development organisations were newsworthy.**
- Development agencies and NGOs were rated as the least newsworthy source of information after government, politicians and private companies.**

Where do the problems lie?



The Mass media is primarily a bridge for information flow:

‘A journalist is only as good as their sources’

Weaknesses in the media:

- **Manipulation by large advertisers and sponsors.**
- **Manipulation by advertisers.**
- **Lack of training in the media and therefore professionalism**
- **Poorly managed media houses ‘running a media house like a taxi’**
- **Underpaid and under resourced journalists.**
- **Distorted by bribes, incentives, facilitation, allowances.**

These problems are recognised by those interviewed in development, but also by media professionals

Is development doing it right?

- **Lack of understanding of the media and linking to the wrong journalists**
- **Presenting development in boring or unusable ways**
 - **Few effective press conferences, large reports rather than press releases etc.**
- **‘Cheque book development’: using money to manipulate ‘news values’**
- **Taking over editorial control of sponsored programmes/articles e.g. supplements**
- **Development promotion rather than allowing debate, discussion and balance.**

Reporting the extremes

Which is more newsworthy?

1) Dog bites man

2) Man bites dog

Why?

Reporting the extremes

Which is more newsworthy?

- 1) Microfinance alleviates poverty
- 2) Microfinance destroyed my livelihood
- 3) Microfinance killed my husband

Reporting the extremes

Why is 'Microfinance destroyed my livelihood' newsworthy?

- **Lack of real and effective public debate on the dangers of poor use of microfinance.**
- **Excessive promotion of microfinance as an answer to poverty (e.g. through paid advertorials in the media).**
- **Poor interaction between the microfinance and media industries.**

A functioning media 'bites'!

'... think towards a journalist as being a big dog who is hungry for its dinner. Now you have a choice, say a bag of sausages in your bag, and think I will throw the sausages because the dog will go after the sausages. But what you cannot do is just keep running and hope for the best because either the dog will go for the sausages or go for you... the idea is feed us with information'

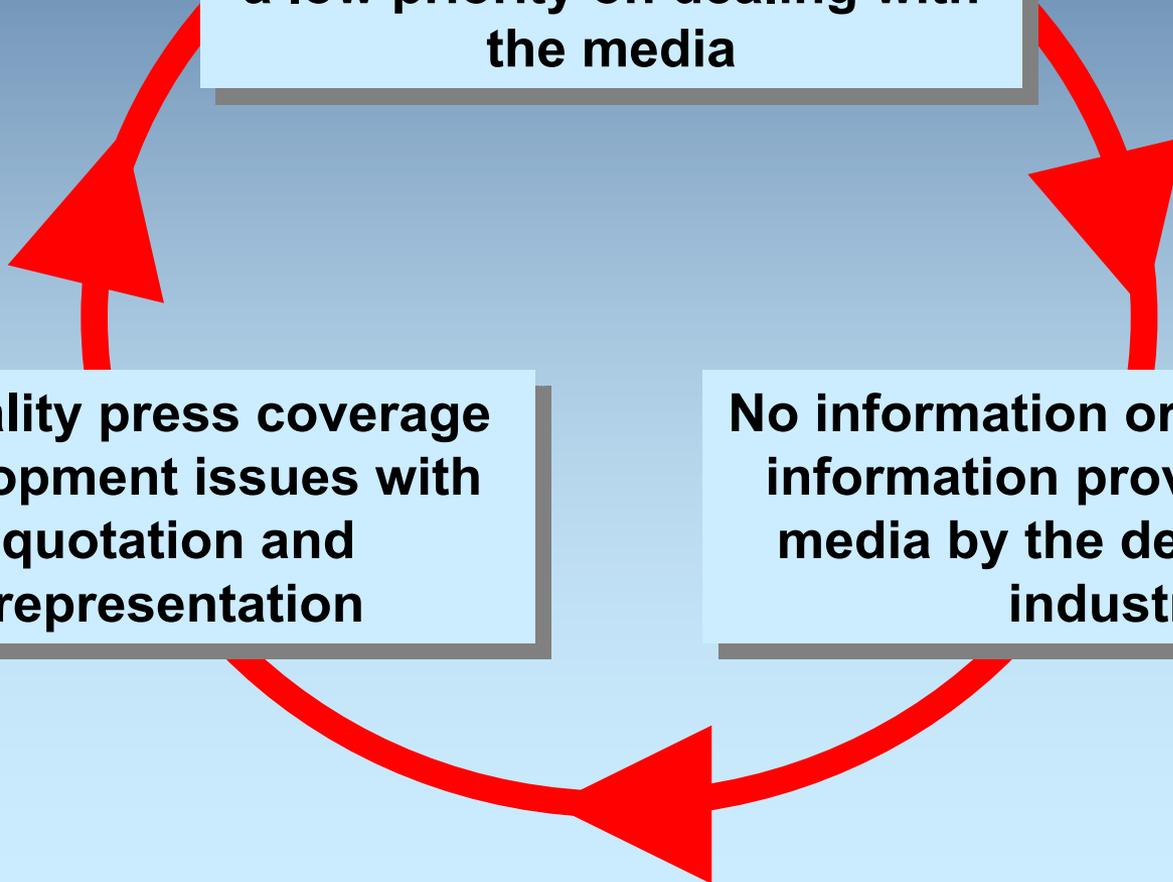
British Business Journalist, 16th August 2004

Breaking the cycle

Development Industry has low respect for media and places a low priority on dealing with the media

Poor quality press coverage of development issues with misquotation and misrepresentation

No information or poor quality information provided to the media by the development industry



How to make development newsworthy

Changing perceptions

FROM

- Dealing with the media, other than on a for fee basis, as a troublesome and unnecessary distraction from the real business of development.

TO

- Perceiving the media as an important partner in increasing impact, creating public understanding and building greater ownership in development.

How to make development newsworthy

‘Making Development Newsworthy’ provides suggestions on :

- 1) Building an in-house understanding of the media and developing a journalist network**
- 2) Preparing and effectively disseminating newsworthy press releases**
- 3) Organising professional press conferences**
- 4) Improving the ongoing dissemination of development information to the media through websites and newsletters.**
- 5) Giving time to and preparing for media interviews.**

Suggested areas that need to be addressed in the media

- 1) Improved image of business journalism in the Ugandan media.**
- 2) More effective training in journalism skills – balance, verification etc.**
- 3) Greater understanding of business issues among business reporters.**
- 4) Improved management of media houses**
- 5) More effective editorial control of journalists.**

Thanks for listening