

MENTORING THE MEDIA

Helping journalists to report well on urban health matters



Mentoring journalists for better stories on urban health matters

Through an innovative implementation project implemented with the support of COMDIS-HSD and Ministry of Health, HERD conducted seven media workshops with around 120 journalists to sensitize them as well as improve their capacity for better stories on urban health matters.

“We have attended a lot of workshops and most of them were similar. I quite liked the idea of this workshop where the facilitators closely engage with the journalists and orient them about various issues related to urban health and journalism good practices.” Parbat Portel, participant in Biratnagar workshop

Health Reporting Practice in Nepal

During the media workshops, public health and media experts led technical sessions. **Rajesh Ghimire**, a seasoned media professional in Nepal highlighted the current context of the health journalism in Nepal.

Ghimire highlighted the existing gaps in the media sector especially the preference of publication of stories mainly given to sensational news rather than the ones of public concern. He also added that through promotion and advocacy of journalism good practices are highlighted in many workshops, it is a known fact that investigative journalism is expensive and time consuming for journalists who are under-paid and not paid regularly.



However, despite given this grim picture, Ghimire stressed on the need for the journalists to apply some of the tips that can encourage and promote publication of powerful stories.

Health Reporting Tips

Some of the health reporting tips provided by Ghimire during the workshop were:

- Correct use of facts and figures
- Use of power of words such as the phrase 'It's a beautiful world and I cannot see it' having a higher impact than the phrase, 'I am Blind'.
- KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) every sentence
- Thinking about what's new in the story (a newer angle/perspective or newness in writing)
- Developing stories that concern people's daily lives
- Understanding the socio-political context behind the story
- Focusing on 'packaging' the story for greater impact

Dr Nilam Ashra McGrath, Research Uptake Manager at COMDIS-HSD highlighted the need of journalists to speak through the research findings. She opined, "Research findings are your friends. They provide vital information relevant to the stories, draw in audiences, promote accountability and provoke responses from responsible authorities."

Dr McGrath also stressed on how the development of 'human interest' angle is important to ensure that the stories are relevant to general public.

Field Visits – Putting Theory into Practice

During the field visits, journalists were particularly encouraged to observe the situation from a 'development' angle – trying to understand the root causes behind the problem rather than just documenting the events/incidents.



The fieldwork involved visiting key personnel in District Health Offices, Municipal Cooperation Office, meeting people in slum, factories to document their

stories related to urban health matters.

Stories Published after Media Workshop

Post the field visits, the journalists' stories were reviewed by HERD team and the journalists were provided feedback to the journalists. Some improvements were made and they were finally published. These stories received good response from the media community as well as the general readers based on comments to the articles received online.

Some of the published stories are presented below:



In an article published in **Rastriya Sandarva**; **Khema Basnet** has wrote about **open defecation prevalent in Pashupati tole of Dhangadi**. The article pointed how the lack of government's attention and poverty has made the people living in that area prone to numerous diseases.

Likewise, in an article published in **Himal Khabarpatrika**; **Dipak Gyawali** wrote about **ineffectiveness of the Community Urban Health Centers due to ignorance of the concerned bodies**. The story reflects how the urban poor have been forced to spend large amount of money at private clinics for the services available free of cost at CUHC.



Likewise, in an article published in **Kantipur Daily**; **Amrita Anmol** addressed one of the most pertinent issues of our time—with growing urbanization as more and more mothers go for work, the tragedy of modern mothers to give time to take care of their newborns and breastfeed them.



Yielding Positive Results

Some journalists courtesy their comprehensive stories have also received with national and regional awards and recognitions.

Benup Raj Bhattarai, journalist from Ilam, who was trained in Biratnagar Workshop received **Mental Health Journalism Award 2014**.



Likewise, **Prabin Dhakal** from Nagarik Daily was recognized for his contribution on the occasion of **World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims 2014**.



Similarly, **Manish Gautam** of **The Kathmandu Post** was received **Mental Health Journalism Award 2015**.



Dr. Sushil Baral, Executive Chairperson at HERD views that good response from the journalists, the media community and the public health sector has been encouraging. He added:

“It was also a test for us to gauge whether we were successful in mentoring the journalists. After seeing the journalists’ work published, we are now hopeful and encouraged that the mentorship model with journalists does seem to work.”

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