



# Health Research Communication and Mass Media in Ethiopia

# Background

- Mass media have excellent potential to promote good health outcomes.
- The mass media can contribute greatly to efforts to address challenges by focusing public attention on these issues, making them more visible in development discourses through their agenda-setting role, and providing accurate and comprehensive information on these issues to the public.

## Contd

- In Ethiopia media coverage of health researches is poor due to the weak link between journalists and researchers, lack of capacity for reporting these issues etc.
- This paper describes the experiences of mass media health research communication in Ethiopia.

# Methods

- The paper based primarily on the personal experiences and reflections of health journalists, health communicators, and literature review.
- The case study approach was adopted because little is known about the modalities of engaging the media with research, in Ethiopia, and the case study approach has been noted as being particularly appropriate for researching an area where few studies have been carried out



## **Role of Media for Health Communication and Ethiopian Experience**

- Mass media ability to disseminate information in a broad, timely, and accessible manner constitute an important source of information for the general public and policymakers.
- Mass media inform, educate, entertain, persuade, socialize, and market commercial products, among other roles



## Contd

- More importantly, the mass media have been shown to have the power to focus public attention on important issues – the media's agenda-setting role.

# Contd

- Health research communication and health communication is.
- OBJECTIVES - The objectives of health communication are:
- **Informing people (Cognitive objective)**
- People are informed about the different diseases, their etiology and how to prevent them. Information increases knowledge and helps people become aware of their health problems and this helps in preventing disease and promoting health.

# Contd

- **Motivating people (Affective objective)**
- It is concerned with clarifying, forming or changing attitudes, beliefs, values or opinions. The mere presence of information does not improve health. After proper health information is given, it is necessary to motivate them to alter their lifestyles so that it becomes favorable to promoting health and preventing disease. Motivation has been defined as “a combination of force which initiate, direct and sustain behaviors.”



## Contd

- **Guiding into action (Behavioral Objective)**
- It is concerned with the development of skills and action a person who has obtained health information and might be motivated to change his behavior and lifestyle. However he might need professional help and guidance so as to bring about these changes and to sustain these altered lifestyles.

# What is Health research communications?

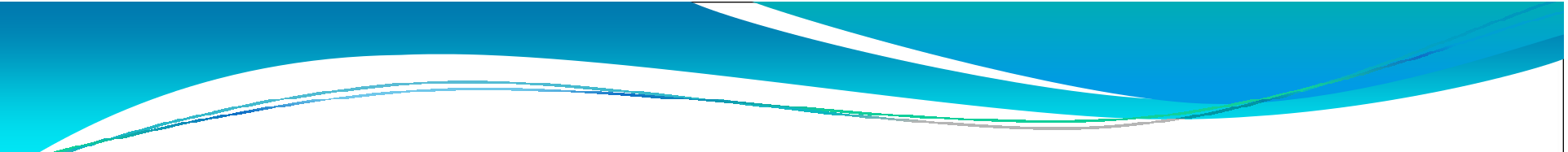
- Research communication is defined as the ability to interpret or translate complex research findings into language, format and context that non experts can understand.
- It is not just about dissemination of research results and is unlike marketing that simply promotes a product. Research communications must address the needs of those who will use the research or benefit from it.

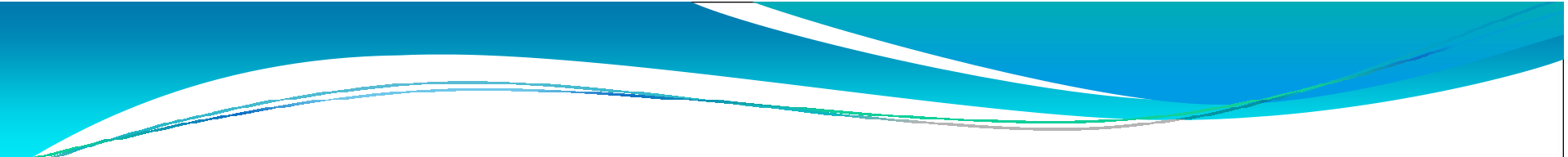
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- In Ethiopia public radio and Tv station health programs are not based on research and have no specific communication strategy.
- Therefore, lack of formative research, proper monitoring and evaluation of effect, and absence of summative evaluations are shared characteristics.

# Contd

- Health programs are generally based on the health policy and strategies of the country and target general audience.
- The planning and production of health message is mainly the responsibility of a journalist.
- Since most journalists are from social science fields, exposure and understanding of health researches and issues is a challenge.

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- Usually Journalists are not interested or motivated to cover health researches due to professional skill, time, budget and technical problems.(Understanding and interpreting researches, changing researches to interesting stories – hard work-creativity-time taking activity, responsibility of weekly program production...)
  - Most mass media cover health issues using - reporting news releases and press conferences, report on health sector activity, interview and phone in radio and Tv programs etc.

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- The purpose is to inform about different diseases, their etiology and how to prevent and cure them.
  - Also, there are few experiences on dissemination of research findings, mostly from international /web sources and local health publications as news information (News Tips). But research communications is not dissemination of findings; it is an engagement in communication.

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- MOH - Health Education Center used to produce and disseminate research based health education audio visual productions and print materials over fifteen years.
- The center had researchers, health professionals, media journalists, artists and other creative production teams. There had been many achievements regarding health communication objectives.
- Now MOH have weekly radio and Tv programs on EBC.

## **Opportunities In Using Mass Media to dissemination of health researches**

- Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by editorial coverage in the press, or on TV and radio, brings a number of benefits. As mentioned above, these media reach very large audiences. Moreover, the credibility of your messages is enhanced by a public perception of medias' impartiality.



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- The public regards mass media as one of its most trusted information sources. When local/national media reports on an event such as a new discovery or a significant research outcome, most people unquestioningly accept the presented version as hard fact

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- The broadcast media specially radio offer a cost-effective way of transmitting information. It does not involve costly and time-consuming production processes – and dissemination is increasingly achieved by rapid and inexpensive electronic means.
- Broadcast media is booming in Ethiopia – opportunity for health research communication is increasing.

# Challenges of Health Research Communication

## **Effective research communications needs:-**

- Distillation of research findings
- Use of plain language
- Making information accessible
- Tailored communications for different audiences
- Identification of the needs of the target groups: and consider technical barriers language and cultural factors etc

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### **The Link between Media and health researchers.**

- Weak relationship among health communication actors, specially there is huge gap exist on the link between researchers/ academics and journalists.

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- Low capacity of journalists to use research to create stories that capture the audience. As well as, general lack of understanding on health topics, specially related to existing and emerging health researches;

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- The capacity of researchers to present source material in a way that the media can use/report. Presenting research findings in ways that encourage the interest and response of journalists is an important skill, and that many researchers struggle with.
- The capacity of civil society to drive public debate around policy related important research.

# Community Expectation from Health Research

- Health is priori agenda for everyone. Health programs always have audiences.
- People are optimistic about knowing health research findings. All respondents agree that audiences highly demand health research findings, and they believe it will improve the quality of their health.
- The community is highly interested to know new health research findings.
- But it has to be simple and interesting, can be used for healthy future.



# **Appropriate media channels in disseminating health research findings**

## **Role of Radio in Health Education**

### **Advantages**

- Has a broader audience than television
- Can also reach illiterate people
- Economical and easily accessible medium



# Cont'd

## TELEVISION

### **Advantages**

- Coverage to large number of people.
- Can also reach illiterate people.
- Can influence public opinion effectively.

### **Disadvantages**

- Disadvantage is the high cost and more time.

# Cont'd

## NEWSPAPERS

- Some newspapers carry special supplements on health every week.
- **Disadvantage**

Small number of copy and limited by the number of readers and the percentage of literate people.

# Cont'd

## **POSTERS**

- Posters are the most common and one of the most effective visual aids.
- They can be effective even in regions of low literacy and low awareness.
- The main advantage is that they are eye catching and they should be artistic.
- The message should be simple and short.
- Should be placed in locations where people frequent like bus stands, hospitals.
- They should be changed frequently to maintain their effect.

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## INTERNET

- Information can be accessed via internet at any place at any point of time. It has brought a revolution in the field **of health education.**
- Communities and individuals can be given an audio visual demonstration .
- The main advantage of internet is its worldwide accessibility and reach.

### **Disadvantages**

- It is expensive

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- The choice of channel is not simple; for a complex communication program, may need to work with professionals such as public relations or marketing communication consultants.
- To determine the appropriate communication channel, identify the people you want to communicate with, research how they obtain information, consider the complexity of the message you want to communicate, calculate the cost of communicating and decide whether you want the communication to be interactive.

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- Even if the appropriate channel for a specific research is based on the message and target audience of that message most of respondents prefer radio due to the following factors.
- Radio is economical and easily accessible medium. Radio broadcasting is relatively low cost to produce and facilitates the translation of programmes into local language broadcasts.

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- Radio has a broader audience than television, and it can also reach illiterate people
- It can readily facilitate a two-way exchange of information, given that presenters may select a variety of people (which could well include researchers) to interview to gain immediate response and feedback on the issues.

# Conclusion

- Mass media can play a valuable role in communicating important research findings to the public, including political leaders, policy makers, and key stakeholders.
- Reporting on research is weak due to lack of link between mass media and health researchers and capacity in accessing, interpreting and using evidence by journalists, as well as lack of capacity to communicate research findings effectively by researchers.





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- Addressing these issues is a worthwhile, yet extremely challenging endeavor that needs recourse, commitment, and patience on both sides.
- The experiences and reflections, reviewed in this paper, indicate that establishing and maintaining relationships between journalists and researchers, strengthen capacity of journalists and researchers can be effective in enhancing quality and quantity of mass media coverage of research.

# The Way Forward

- **Positive mass media Relation**
- Managing and educating media contacts carefully and appropriately can help realize the enormous potential of the mass media for sharing research findings.- MOH, Associations and Universities.
- Establishing and maintaining relationships between journalists and researchers through regular informal meetings between journalists and researchers, organizing field visits for journalists, and building formal partnerships with professional media associations and individual journalists.- etc

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- **Building the capacity of journalists**
- Inspire and build the capacity of journalists to do on health research issues through training and media award of excellence for quality coverage. (Motivation)
- **Building the capacity of researchers to interact with media professionals**
- Building the capacity of health researchers to communicate their research to media through training and providing technical assistance to journalists in obtaining and interpreting evidence.

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- **The provision of source material for media reporting**
- **Develop Health Knowledge Center for everyone.**
- Research communication officers/ specialists can make considerable impact in designing and implementing research communication strategies , working sensitively with researchers to refine output and gaining good experience about which media contact is most appropriate to target with any given information.
- Provide the source using media mailing list, thematic press briefings, free information magazine, and research web

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## **Develop and maintain strong Network**

Research communications involves a **complex network** of knowledge producers, intermediaries and knowledge users :-

Researchers , Journalists, Donors, NGOs and practitioners

- Civil society organisations, Policy makers, Governments, Individual beneficiaries

# Thank You

