

27 Jul 2017

Few market systems programmes work with the media. Are we missing out?



Helen Bassey-Osijo



Kevin Seely

If you work in a development programme, there is a high chance that the media can help you achieve your goals. Yet out of the 31 projects using a markets systems approach we identified worldwide, only a quarter have chosen media outlets as partners.

This blog post aims to help practitioners address this. We summarise how the media can help a wide range of programmes achieve their objectives. To encourage practitioners to explore media partnerships further, we share our top tips on how to influence the media sustainably. Throughout, we draw on experience from several countries, particularly Nigeria.

Why work with the media?

The media's importance lies partly in its outreach. Many development programmes want to increase women and men's access to information. In most low and middle-income countries, the media already does this. Radio stations - and increasingly other media - communicate daily with large, disparate and remote audiences.

The media also has influence. This influence can help many development programmes that work to change people's behaviour. From smallholder farmers to senior politicians, the media can encourage people to do the right (or wrong) thing. At its best, the media can give voice to isolated and vulnerable people and pressure policy-makers and business leaders to understand and address their concerns.

In short, influencing the media presents development programmes with a huge opportunity for impact. If interventions are carried out in a sustainable way, emphasising ownership and the right incentives, the media can continue informing and influencing your target group, long after the project ends.

This huge potential is evident when we examine the experience of real market systems programmes. The

four examples below highlight what can be achieved.

In Nigeria, **ENABLE2** has worked closely with editors and journalists to mentor and encourage them to dedicate more airtime and newsprint to the concerns of small businesses across Nigeria. Facing greater media pressure, government officials are now beginning to address problems they might otherwise ignore. After ten months of sustained media coverage, a regional government has begun to act on frequent fires devastating local marketplaces. Officials have upgraded firefighting equipment, planned preventive measures and educated traders on the benefits of insurance. Market traders, who could save millions of dollars from the implementation of these measures, have praised the media for advancing their cause.

In Zimbabwe, the **ZIMBISA** programme together with The Sunday Mail newspaper launched a supplement in the paper's business section focusing on issues faced by local smallholder farmers in the clothing and cotton industry. The supplement became a platform to represent the voices of many, and the publication of balanced information. Impartial reporting, and an opportunity for change, increased the column's popularity with readers and the government was willing to engage in dialogue with the sector.

In Albania, where one third of 15-29 year olds are unemployed, the **Risi programme encouraged the media to offer more frequent and better information to young job-seekers**. Roughly 51,000 Albanians have changed their job-seeking behaviour as a result. As of November 2016, eleven media programmes continued to provide valuable information to Albania's job-seekers, without the support of a project.

The FIT programmes in Uganda worked closely with, and encouraged, several radio stations to offer more and better information – this time to small businesses. Before interventions began, none of Uganda's radio stations ran informative shows for small enterprises. FIT spotted a gap in the market, and by the end of the programme, one third of stations were providing information to small enterprises, without requiring further programme support. Seven million Ugandans were regularly listening to business-related programmes and 96% of listeners surveyed said these shows had benefited their enterprises.

Many market systems practitioners, having understood the media's huge developmental potential, want to explore media partnerships. Some practitioners hold back because they are unsure how.

How can you engage the media sustainably?

In a blog post we can only begin to answer this question, but below we share our three top tips, informed by ENABLE's seven years of media partnerships and the experience of programmes elsewhere.

1. Start by diagnosing constraints. Understand if there is unmet demand for the type of content which interests your programme or your target population. If there is no demand why would the media want to cover it? You may first need to explore ways of **making your chosen issue newsworthy**.

If you've spotted a gap in the market, diagnose what is preventing media in your location from filling it. The media terrain varies from country to country, and sometimes within countries. For example, whereas in Nigeria most radio stations are privately owned, in Zimbabwe most are government controlled. Media in these two countries face very different competitive pressures.

2. Access to audience figures can incentivise better journalism. In many developing countries, newspapers, radio and television stations lack credible data on their audience size. Without such

data, investments in better journalism are often uninformed, and can lose the media money and advertisers will rarely pay more for publicity unless it reaches a larger audience with the demographic the advertiser needs. So for the media to attract more advertising revenue, they need trusted, independent audience data.

In Nigeria industry body Media Planning Services collects this data. Their annual survey involves more than 12,000 interviews nationwide. Yet in 2015, no media house in northern Nigeria would pay to access their data. ENABLE set out to understand why.

Northern media managers viewed the data sceptically. ENABLE therefore facilitated an agreement. Over two years, influential northern Nigerian media executives took part in the field data collation as observers. In exchange, they gave Media Planning Services feedback on how to improve its research. As a result of this partnership, northern media houses began to see the data as credible.

To complement media houses' growing interest in audience figures, ENABLE trained research and marketing teams on how to use this information to attract advertising. Seeing the opportunity to increase its revenue, Freedom Radio Kano became northern Nigeria's first audience research subscriber in 2016. Two other northern media market leaders have since followed them, turning large audience into large revenues. **This provides the right incentives for the media to cover the issues which matter most to ordinary Nigerians.**

3. Consider building journalists' capacity. The media's ability to inform and voice the concerns of their audience is often constrained by journalists' abilities and areas of interest. In many countries in-depth, issue-centred and rural-focused reporting is rare. This was the case in parts of Nigeria before ENABLE intervened. Short of time and money, journalists tended to cover the issues facing people easily reached within the city centres. Most journalists also lacked the skills needed for in-depth research.

ENABLE2 has trained and mentored journalists to address these capacity gaps. Independent experts' assessments and audience feedback both show more in-depth reporting, greater relevance of content to rural audiences and greater follow-up on stories. With better quality journalism, media houses are attracting larger audiences. For example, Freedom Radio's Duniyar mu a yau, averaged 246,000 listeners in August 2016. Six months later after improving their content, this live news radio show had 837,000 listeners.

What next?

This blog outlines the opportunities for market systems programmes in working with the media. It is only fair that we acknowledge some of the difficulties as well. We are considering a second blog post, outlining key challenges and how ENABLE tries to overcome them. If you're interested, please let us know by commenting below. One thing we've learned from the media is that we should respect our audience.

> [ENABLE2 website](#)

Other blogs from ENABLE2:

> [Community journalism networks](#)

> [Influencing Government: five top tips](#)

