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WORLD **DIABETES** FOUNDATION

# MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

**Tracking Coverage on Diabetes and Non Communicable Diseases in  
the Local Media**

June, 2015

## **01. Introduction**

Journalists Association Against AIDS (JournAIDS) with financial support from World Diabetes Foundation is implementing a diabetes prevention project. The project is in line with the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2016, the 2011-2021 Global Diabetes Plan and the 2013-2020 Global Strategy on Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The organization collaborates with College of Medicine, Ministry of Health and the Diabetes Association of Malawi.

The media monitoring report captures critical issues relevant to the media landscape and awareness in the context of highlighting NCDs in the local media. The local media in the country's radio stations, newspapers, TV stations and other media platforms continues to play a role in raising awareness and educating the local masses.

The media monitoring report is part of the advocacy project which seeks to capture important issues in diabetes prevention. The report also feeds into the reporting system of JournAIDS in the NCD program to inform the organization's strategic goals and policy stand around NCDs. The report covers the period of December, 2014 to June, 2015 and it also happens to the second milestone in the current project WDF 14-858 financed by the World Diabetes Foundation.

During the reporting period, JournAIDS has interacted with reporters, editors, CSOs, Ministry of Health policy and decision makers. The organization has actively participated in various events such as Sub-technical working group meetings, seminars and also scaling up media coverage through its flagship column in the Sunday Times "*The Watch on Non Communicable Diseases*".

## **02. The scope of the report**

The report captures key issues in media coverage in the last 6 months and important policy issues which JournAIDS has been monitoring over the reporting period. The report examines various issues related to policy, service delivery and advocacy issues. The major limitation in the methodology of the report is that JournAIDS was not able to capture news articles across radio stations due to huge costs in media monitoring.

## **03. Key Summary of Findings**

### 3.1 Coverage on new policy issues related to diabetes

The organization through its column, "*The Watch on Non Communicable Diseases*" was the source of new policy issues. For instance a new policy paper from the International Diabetes Federation linking climate change and diabetes highlighted new environmental and health policy issues which are mostly neglected within the policy landscape. For instance the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2016 does not mention or link climate change with health issues although there is overwhelming evidence that NCDs such as diabetes are fuelled by climate change due to food insecurity and shifting of lifestyles to more sedentary living standards.

In addition the same column in the Sunday Times also published an article drawing on new evidence from Overseas Development Institute (ODI) which links price hikes to obesity due to scarcity and high prices of healthy foods across many countries. The fact that Malawi is not investing in critical research issues around new policy issues, this is an area policy makers and researchers need to look into so that policy issues are able to shape new research.

### 3.2 Responsiveness of the local media in coverage

In the reporting period JournAIDS recorded 25 news articles on NCDs and diabetes reported across Daily Times, Sunday Times and The Nation newspaper. Overall the Blantyre Newspapers Limited (BNL) group which also owns the Daily Times and the Sunday Times is the one which registered 19 news articles in total surpassing all other newspapers.

It is also important to note that JournAIDS produced a Position Paper titled “Reframing *the national diabetes response; the voices of patients*”. Among many recommendations the paper called for the need to scale up the NCDs budgetary allocations by government. In addition it also called for aid transparency from donors to invest in NCDs. Out of the 10 media houses who were circulated with the paper, only Daily Times picked up the position paper and wrote a story out of it, the articles was written by Josephine Chinele.

In order to increase media coverage, there is a need for responsiveness in the local journalists which is essential to sustain the gains achieved in media coverage over the years.

### 3.3 Availability of opinion articles

A scan across the Nation Publications Limited (NPL) publishers of the The Nation, Nation on Sunday and Weekend Nation, including BNL group, revealed there was only one column fully dedicated to NCDs and diabetes. The column called “The Watch on Non Communicable Diseases” is the first of its kind in Malawi’s print media. There is a need to ensure that such types of columns be sustained. In addition although radio stations are not in the scope of this report. It is critical that also radio stations take a lead in establishing new and innovative NCD focused radio features or related programs which are hugely missing at the moment.

### 3.4 Collaboration of media and CSOs in scaling up coverage

In the monitoring period, the local media covered stories which were made possible by support from civil society organizations. The CSOs also played a role as news sources to the media. In terms of mental health, an area which is not adequately covered, Farm Radio Trust have been instrumental to raise awareness in the media. In addition Diabetes Association of Malawi and other CSOs have continued to support the media, the level of collaboration remains positive. It is important to note that most media houses rely on CSOs to generate NCD related stories, without this collaboration, coverage will be extremely difficult.

### 3.5 Status on the access to information law

Malawi does not have an access to information law, the bill is yet to be enacted into law. The National Media Institute of Southern Africa (NAMISA) and other CSOs with support from Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and Tilitonse Fund are working towards speeding up the enactment process. JournAIDS is also part of the CSO movement which is pushing for the law.

The law is essential not only for the media to access information in news coverage but to all stakeholders as part of democratic governance. A 2014 media baseline survey conducted by JournAIDS showed that most media houses struggle to access information from government line ministries which also hampers health coverage, including NCDs. A recent meeting with the rapporteur of Access to Information in Africa, Pansy Tlakula gives hope that the bill would be enacted by September, 2015.

### **4.0 Key Recommendations**

- It is important media capacity building be sustained and ensure to have continued dialogue with media houses both in the print and electronic media to keep the media committed to increase media coverage.
- Government especially the Ministry of Health should put in place mechanisms to allow the media access information across its departments to facilitate media coverage. Additionally the government has an obligation to guarantee access to information in line with Section 37 of the Republican Constitution, hence enacting the Access to Information bill into law needs to be done urgently as all the processes have been completed.
- As part of the implementation of the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2016, Ministry of Health's NCDs and Mental Health Department should ensure that it improves its visibility by working closely with the local media as one way of strengthening media relations and increasing media coverage on various interventions the department is undertaking across the country.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

There is a need to continue supporting the local media across the country to scale up reporting on NCDs and diabetes. At present the media have a lot of capacity gaps which need to be addressed, only one CSO cannot address the enormous challenges, it is critical that all CSOs collaborate with the local media to improve media coverage. Taking into serious consideration that countries will be agreeing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), NCDs have been reflected in SDG Goal 3 which now gives JournAIDS and its stakeholders more impetus to strengthen advocacy around diabetes and NCD prevention.