

PRB engage journos in IDEA Project

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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US based Population Reference Bureau (PRB) continues to engage the Malawi media in a project called Informing Decision makers to Act (IDEA), in an attempt to help journalists take part through media activities to help change Malawi's population projections which is set to hit 60 million people by 2050, if the current trend continues unabated.



Rob Jamieson

Malawi's media trainer Rob Jamieson, who is PRB consultant, told a group of journalists this week that the project brings a fresh vision to providing information about family planning and reproductive health to policy audiences.

The aim of the project

He explained that through IDEA, PRB works toward three main project results which are to analyze, synthesize, and disseminate health and population data and information in order to engage relevant policy and advocacy audiences.

The other ones, Jamieson said, is to strengthen the capacity of media to provide quality coverage of key health and population issues as well as improving individual and institutional capacity to use information to influence policymakers.

Among other approaches, he said PRB is using publications that have non-technical language to provide journalists with information on the importance of investing in family planning.

Strengthening knowledge and skills

PRB has been operating in Malawi since 2011 and during this period it has supported a variety of capacity building activities for journalists.

"Media capacity building is focused on strengthening knowledge and skills to report on population, family planning, and related issues effectively," explained Jamieson.

He said the past activities have included periodic study tours where PRB has taken journalists to different parts of the country to see projects that offer promising practices in family planning and reproductive health.

"PRB also worked with the Health Policy Initiative to work with journalists as part of the launch of the 2010 RAPID, bringing them to national and district level dissemination meetings, followed by site visits of FP/RH [Family Planning/Reproductive Health] and development programs in the districts," explained Jamieson who is the former chairperson of the Southern Africa Editors Forum (SAEF).



Journalists interviewing a source in one of the field trips

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He said PRB ensures that appropriate information and resources are available for the journalists, including announcements about media opportunities and new publications such as PRB journalist guides, data sheets, and policy briefs.

Opportunities to collaborate

In addition to continuing study tours and targeted dissemination, Jamieson said IDEA looks forward to opportunities to collaborate with other journalist networks, and introducing a course on population and reproductive health issues for journalism students at the Malawi

Institute of Journalism (MIJ).

Between last year and 2012 PRB has organised activities that include four study tours focusing on family planning and selected cross-cutting topics, such as youth, integrating FP and other types of health services, and family planning in decentralised settings.

It has also mobilised journalists for the national population conference as well as ensuring that appropriate information and resources are available for the PRB network of journalists, including announcements about media opportunities and new publications.

The organisation also continues to collaborate with local FP/RH partner's media efforts where possible, and look for opportunities to complement the activities of other journalist organisations and networks.

It has also managed to assess the feasibility of supporting a population and health course for journalism students at the Malawi Institute of Journalism (MIJ).

This week journalists underwent an intensive training on youth development and population and also conducted media tours to observe how youth groups were taking their role in the matter.

Aubrey Kusakala, who works for MIJ FM, said during the activity that through IDEA and other projects, where PRB has worked with journalists in Malawi for several years they have learnt a lot.



Aubrey Kusakala

Drawing attention to health and population issues

"These trainings keep on putting us on positions of authority over these issues," he said, adding that since then there has been an improvement in quality of coverage of key health and population issues by most media outlets.

Jamieson said under this activity, as PRB they expect to continue strengthening the capacity of reporters and editors to understand and report on FP/RH-as it contributes to health and development.

He said through IDEA, PRB has a long-standing relationship with the Malawian media, and views this as an opportunity to draw greater attention to health and population issues in Malawi, as well as institutionalizing FP/RH content within journalism schools and through study tours and seminar for both young and veteran journalists.

"Through this increased coverage, we expect to support efforts to reposition FP while also reaching policy audiences with information about strategies to more effectively meet the FP/RH needs of the Malawian public," he said.

During the tour in Machinga district, executive director of Youth Impact, Chipiliro Phiri said they have been greatly assisted with materials and presentations made available by PRB through the media in supporting health and population advocacy, training, and reporting.

During the media tour, funded by USAID, Jamieson announced that PRB will introduce an annual media award that will reward journalists who would have worked better than their colleagues.

"This award will also be country specific as PRB plans to introduce it in all countries where it is working," he said.

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