



Statement by

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“Media Handbook for Development Researchers”

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Ladies and Gentlemen

One of society's greatest assets in its pursuit of a better quality of life is human curiosity and inquisitiveness. The observation and recording of social conditions as well as trends often gives us a basis of fact for establishing certain truths, revising long-held beliefs and planning future actions. Social and development research enables us to understand complex and often controversial issues. It can deepen our knowledge and empower us to improve our lives.

In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, research is beginning to show us the true scale of the potential impact of climate change. It is celebrating the successes in rolling back epidemics like HIV/Aids, malaria and tuberculosis; and it is providing a starting point for debating social growth as well as its challenges.

Research can help us to appreciate our own health and safety, as well as that of the environment in which we live. It can also help us to reduce the costs of current technologies or spur us to enhance their capabilities. Yet, the true test of development research is whether people use it – be it for reference, for influence and, most importantly, for change. For research to be useful, it first has to be accountable to the public about whom it is carried out and for whose benefit it is designed.

Communication is vital in putting research into the public domain. However, researchers, like most other professionals, do not have much communication training. Although numerous communication channels exist, the most cost-effective and efficient are the mass media. In our circumstances, it has not been optimally used to disseminate research findings.

A study by Panos Eastern Africa three years ago found that the media and researchers are mutually suspicious of one another. Often, the relationship

between them has been characterized by open dissatisfaction and even acrimony. While it may not be necessary to repeat any of the grouses here, it is important to note that media use creates awareness about the research activities and therefore promotes transparency and accountability. This transparency minimises duplication of work and reduces the cost on individual researcher to disseminate their findings.

Media use also carries a benefit for research in that it can help to generate support from various stakeholders while giving the public an asset. When research findings are shared beyond one organisation, the world is richer as a result. The media, on the other hand, occupies the realm of public interest where issues such as the environment, gender parity, economic wellbeing and growth, environment and energy are constantly under debate. The new knowledge that is generated by research can inform the debates that ultimately shape policy.

Clearly, there are more benefits accruing from cooperation than from competition between the media and the research community. I see the potential for a powerful alliance between these two agents of change to further debate on problems and solutions as well as ideas and actions. The *Media Handbook for Development Researchers* tackles a half of the problem by explaining how the media works and how researchers can use them for their benefit. It demolishes the walls of misunderstanding and fear that have thus far prevented researchers from sharing their findings with the media as robustly as they should.

In this regard, the handbook can be a useful tool in forging the alliance between the media and research. Research, like the media, might not directly cause policy change or reform, but individually, they can frame the debate that shapes it. Together, they cannot only frame these debates but also begin to shape them.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my very singular pleasure to now declare the *Media Handbook for Development Researchers* officially launched.