

NGOs and Media

The functions of media are diverse, ranging from news, discussions, and information and education to raising awareness. NGOs can have many different reasons to deal with media. Common goals of NGOs to use media are:

Enhancing the Visibility of Your Organization and Name Recognition

Projection of organization is very important for sustainability of organizations. Donors and governments think twice before funding an organization that is well known and popular. If an NGO is known, it is easier to mobilize supporters.

Informing the Public about Your Activities

Media is an effective way to reach target communities. An article about what you are doing can give potential clients an opportunity to start a conversation with their peers and partners about NGO work.

Generate Public Support for Activities and Organization

Public support for what NGO is doing does not come automatically. Media attention for NGO work is a good tool to do exactly that.

Increasing Fundraising or Membership

Increasing membership and fundraising can be built upon positive media coverage. Very big membership organizations mostly use media to expand their membership successfully.

Stimulating Discussion on the Issues under Consideration

Many issues exist in different communities with changing intensity: illiteracy, ill health, poverty, less developed communities, child rights. Individuals form their opinions on the

basis of the opinions of their peers (family, friends) and what they see, hear and read in the media. NGOs can help them to develop informed opinions.

Good Media Coverage Does Not Come Automatically: It Is Hard Work

It is not true that individuals or organizations receive positive media coverage without working for it. Media work can be exhausting because it takes investments and commitments without having a lot of sound results at first. But look at organizations in your country that have a lot of positive media coverage; they most probably have a media strategy and a media plan, together with spokespersons, resources and people working on media contacts. Investing in building up media contacts requires a consensus in your own organization. The work can be done by an appointed media person, even if he or she spends only a few hours a week on this.

STEP ONE

Develop a Communication Strategy

A good way to develop consensus within your organization is to develop a communication strategy and to build up effective media contacts. Critical elements of a communication strategy are:

- **Your message**
- **Target audiences and target media**

a) You need to be able to tell journalists and through them the general public what your organization stands. And most important, make sure that everyone in your organization shares those values and shares the message.

b) Different audiences are reached by different media. If, for instance, young people are the audience that you want to reach, find out which media they use. More important, find

out which media they trust. If you have identified your target audience(s), find out for what purpose you want to reach them:

- To become clients,
- To stimulate discussions,
- To inform them on what to do in specific cases,
- To educate them on values,
- To help them develop opinions,

Generally, the following remarks on different media can be made:

- Printed press tends to be an elite medium which is very appropriate to reach out to the influential people, politicians and policy makers in your society.
- Radio tends to be a medium for a very broad audience.
- TV tends to be mainly a medium for entertainment. Exceptions are sometimes talk shows and news shows.

If you have set your messages, your target audiences and your target media, it is time to look at the means and tools you can use, to develop a work plan.

STEP TWO

Build up effective media contacts

Building up media contacts depends first on building personal contacts with journalists.

You can do this by:

- Providing them with quality information.
- Answering their questions immediately.
- Not lying to journalists on whatever occasion. They will find out, and it will damage your relationship forever.

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- Do not assume that they know what you mean by, for instance, talking about sustainable development.
- Helping them frames your issues in a way they can convince their editors that your story is important. Keep an eye on what is going on in the media, our issues are related to a lot of other ongoing discussions.

STEP THREE

Define your tool and materials

- Your work is news if you make it news. Opening a clinic is news if a locally important person is opening the clinic. A training course for women working in education is news if you show journalists that the women are learning something new.
- Send out press releases that are short, to the point and mainly meant to keep journalists updated on your work.
- Organize press briefings when you really feel that you have something that should go out to the general public.
- Have good spokespersons. Most organizations will appoint their director as the most important spokesperson.
- New media, such as the Internet, are important but not as important as many people think these days.

Dealing with Disaster

We are dealing with controversial issues which means that most of us are also once in a while or on a regular basis dealing with hostile media. The reasons for being hostile need to be identified:

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- **Media that is hostile towards you because they are not well enough informed**
- **Media that is intentionally hostile to you**

Many NGOs suffer from shyness whenever they do something that can cause discussion, such as organizing sex education in schools. They try to hide what they do. That strategy will cause major difficulties. The best way to do this is:

If you know you are doing something that is controversial, organize the discussion yourself. That enables you to stay in control. Put an interview in the papers, on the radio or on TV, announce what you want to do and ask for reactions. Discuss your case; there is nothing you have to hide and you will be able to get many people on your side. Some media are hostile to your work and your organization on purpose, because of their ownership, religion or bias. You are wasting your time trying to convince them, do not give them interviews or materials. Try to counteract them with positive coverage in other media.

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