STATISTICS IN THE MEDIA

UNDERSTANDING BASIC TIPS

A PRESENTATION TO JOURNALISTS
NBS Conference Room

25th Feb, 2016

ISSUES TO BE COVERED

1.Introduction: Statistics in the Media

2.Telling the story: How to write statistical stories

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1. STATISTICS IN THE MEDIA

❑Can be **valid**, **precise** and **relevant**, or they can be **flawed**, **misleading** and **superficial**

❑Can **entertain**, **educate** and **guide**, or they can **support falsehoods**, **confuse** and **demoralize**

❑Can promote **justice**, **equality**, **harmony** and **social progress**, or they can **rationalize injustice**, **poverty**, **elitism**, **pilferage** and **warfare** (Prof. Karim F. Hirji – *Statistics in the Media: Learning from Practice*, 2012)

STATISTICS IN THE MEDIA

❑There are **two** categories of statistics:

1.**Supplied statistics:** Supplied to journalists by news sources ie NBS, Ministries, DSE, Telecom, Banks etc

2.**Compiled statistics:** Journalists compile statistics during news gathering process

❑Are they similar? Do they require similar journalistic treatment? Should journalists duplicate supplied statistics?

2.TELLING THE STATISTICS

❑Reporting statistics has two problems:

1. It is **boring**, and

2. It is **complicated**

❑**So, what to do?**

✓Journalists' task is to make statistics

1. Understandable, and

2. Interesting

❑**How can this be done?**

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

1. **Understand the Context:**

❑ Like any source, statistics cannot always be trusted. It comes with its own histories, biases, and objectives

❑ **Ask**: Who gathered it, when, and for what purpose? How was it gathered? (The methodology)

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

2.Turn statistics into stories

- ❑ A good journalist needs to do more than report statistics. Need to **explain/question** what they mean (gas production figures, local content employment figures,health statistics etc)

- ❑ **NOTE**: "*Do not put faith in what statistics say until you have carefully considered what they do not say*" (William W. Watt).

- ❑ Constantly ask "why?" – or "why not?"

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

3. **Always Compare Statistics**:

❑ A statistical figure has little significance on its own, its true value comes from comparison (year & year, month & month etc)

❑ Read this publication, NBS (2015), **"TANZANIA IN FIGURES 2014:"**

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

- ❑ "A comparison of the 2007-08 THMIS and 2011-12 THMIS HIV prevalence estimates indicates that HIV prevalence has declined slightly from 6 percent to 5 percent among adults age 15-49. Similarly, HIV prevalence has also modestly declined among women, from 7 to 6 percent, and among men, from 5 to 4 percent
- ❑ "

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

4. **Use statistics sparingly**:

- ❑ Use only necessary statistics, eliminate that are not.

- ❑ Do not empty all your notebook

- ❑ If all statistics must be used, **create/use charts and tables**

- ❑ Analyze data from a variety of perspectives. Don't just report overall figures (like how many children people want to have); look for differences based on age, gender, income, region, and urban/rural residency

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

5. **Avoid Statistical Jargons**:

❑ What do these words mean?

✓ Body Mass Index (BMI), Price Deflator, Real Domestic Income, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), HIV Prevalence Rate, Literacy Rate etc

❑ Read this publication, NBS (2011), "**Concepts and Definitions for Official Statistics in Tanzania: Second Edition**"

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

❑   What about this?

✓   **"According to NBS, the Low Birth Weight in rural Tanzania is increasing steadily"**

✓   Any idea?

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

6. **Define Statistical Terms**:

❑When you cannot get rid of statistical jargon, define/explain it

Read this:

"According to NBS, the **Low Birth Weight** - infants who weigh less than 2.5 kg at birth - is increasing steadily in rural Tanzania."

3.TELLING STATISTICS STORIES -Tips

7. **Go beyond press releases/conferences**: These are your starting point. You may need to talk to/look for sources among: Outside analysts, people who design/implement the program, consultants, academics, ordinary people etc

8. **Always include people's voices**:

❑ They are the main stakeholders – mostly affected (ordinary people)

❑ Analyze the implications of survey findings for policy, equality and governance.

A Quote for You

❑ "Journalists are a proud bunch. I know because I am one of them. None of us like to admit our ignorance especially when a govt or some bigshot takes that opportunity to humiliate us. But we are communicators, **not all-knowing pundits**, and we have an obligation to communicate to our readers, If we don't understand, they wont. Never let pride stop you from saying: 'I am sorry, I don't understand. Can you explain that to me?" – Paul Hemp

Exercise: Find the Headline

- Take some time to read and interpret the data. What are the trends or patterns? Are there any surprises? Any unexpected relationships? Any good or bad news?

- Identify a data point that represents a possible story.

- What do you need to know more about? What additional data would help you flesh out your story? Check the indicator in a previous survey. Have there been any changes?

- Write a draft headline and first paragraph.

Finding the Story 1

- Is the information new, surprising or unusual?

- Does it affect a large number of people?

- Is it related to something that is on people's minds?

- Does it suggest that policies or strategies are – or are not – working?

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