

# Repoa Brief



## Tracer Study for Research Users: The case of TGN Media Training

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This brief assesses the relevance, use, and outcomes of training workshops offered by REPOA to media personnel in 2008, 2009, and 2010 on the use of the Tanzania Governance Noticeboard (TGN) for following up public budgets and expenditures. The assessment is based on 50% of the media persons who participated in the training, which involved three main topics: (i) media and good governance; (ii) the public budgeting process; and (iii) the content of the TGN website and the use of the TGN to develop media articles. Each of these themes had several sub-topics.

The findings revealed that the respondents found the course to be very relevant for the three main themes, with relevance ratings ranging from 70% to nearly 90% for the specific topics. However, there were differences in the perception of relevance among the sub-topics, with three of the four sub-topics on the TGN scoring less than 60%. About 85% of the respondents stated that the way they worked had improved since their training. The use of the TGN increased from less than 19% before the training to 77% after the training, although the use was not regular. In addition, about 60% felt that they had experienced an increase in the number of articles written after the training, while about 90% felt that there were changes in the content of the articles, mainly in the form of better data to support their stories. Differences in relevance and use were due mostly to the mix of participants in terms of qualifications, experience and position in the media, challenges in the use of the TGN website such as delays in updating the website, and lack of comprehension of the topics due to the short duration of the training.

Following their training, slightly more than half (51%) of the respondents reported that they had carried out post-training follow-ups of budgets and expenditures. In some cases these follow-ups had resulted in real changes in improving transparency and accountability in national and local budgets. Nevertheless, nearly half had not carried out any follow-ups. This may be due to the limitations of the course.

Based on these findings the following recommendations are proposed: (i) a review of the TGN database; (ii) a longer duration for the training; (iii) more care in the selection of participants; (iv) some changes in the training content; and (v) changes in the delivery and facilitation methodology.

Four policy implications have been identified: (i) improved access to the internet across the country; (ii) greater transparency in access to documents; (iii) enhancement of female participation in the media sector; and (iv) a revision of media laws.

## Background

The media in Tanzania has gone from being the tool of the government during colonial times and the early post-independence era to providing more critical reports of government policies and programmes since the introduction of a market economy and multi-party democracy in the 1990s. There have also been increases in the numbers of newspapers and radio and television stations. For instance, by June 2007 there were 35 dailies and 184 weeklies compared with 6 and 16, respectively, in 1992. Nevertheless, the development of the media in Tanzania has not been smooth for two main reasons: (i) uneven access to information, a problem made more complex by restrictive laws; and (ii) gaps in training. The latter issue prompted the short-term training programmes conducted by REPOA in 2008, 2009, and 2010, using the Tanzania Governance Noticeboard (TGN) with a special focus on public expenditures and accountability. The programme was important for two reasons: (i) the TGN would provide the media with a consolidated source of official government data on public budgets and (ii) it would increase the skills of the media to carry out follow-ups of such issues.

This brief is based on an assessment of that training, which had the following objectives: (i) explore the opinions of graduates and their employers on the relevance, adequacy, and use of the training offered in the light of their employment functions; (ii) examine ways in which the knowledge and capacities obtained in the training have been used to influence transparency and accountability within government processes, and with what effects; and (iii) suggest possible ways of enhancing the training courses so that they are responsive to the actual needs of the trainees.

The findings are based on a sample of forty-seven trainees (50%) out of a total of ninety-one participants who participated in the five training workshops carried out between 2008 and 2010. Data from each of the forty-seven respondents was collected using a self-administered questionnaire, and supplemented with in-depth interviews with a few of the respondents, some senior representatives of the employers of the respondents, and senior members of media and non-media organisations that had conducted media training in the past ten years.

One serious limitation of the study was the fact that it was not possible to get the perspectives of the senior representatives of all the participants' employers. Furthermore, even where these representatives were available, they were not able to describe the effectiveness of the TGN training because there were no systems in their media houses for employers to assess the impact of any specific training on the performance of their employees. For these two reasons the analysis and conclusions for this study are based mainly on the information from the trainees.

## Findings

### Profile of the Respondents

The forty-seven respondents came from nineteen media and media-related institutions, with the largest contingent (76%) coming from the print media. The majority (64%) were male, reflecting the general overall gender composition of the total trainees who participated in the REPOA training between 2008 and 2010, as well as the current pattern of employment by gender in the media sector in Tanzania as a whole. REPOA had targeted middle to senior media personnel for the training, but only about a third of the respondents were employed at a senior level (holding posts as editors); the majority were junior staff (reporters).

The highest level of basic education for the majority (55%) was secondary education. At the level of professional training, only 6.4% had a university degree, while the majority had an undergraduate diploma (55.3%) or certificate (38.3%). In terms of experience, the period of employment ranged from a few months to sixteen years. Only about a fifth had more than ten years' experience; the majority had worked in the media industry for less than five years. Thus there was a mix of participants by education, experience, and seniority.

Another characteristic of the participants was that although they had attended training before and after the REPOA training, none of these courses included training in the use of the TGN. Similarly, only about 10% had undergone training that involved topics on public budgets and expenditures. This meant that the REPOA Media Training, with its main focus on public budgets and expenditures by using the TGN, was new to nearly 90% of the respondents. It also meant that when the respondents were asked about their perspectives on the REPOA training, their opinions were not affected by any other training that they might have undergone before or after the REPOA training.

### Relevance of the Training Topics

The training consisted of three major themes: (i) media and good governance; (ii) understanding public budgeting processes for reporting; and (iii) the Tanzania Governance Noticeboard (theoretical and practical). Each of these themes contained sub-themes. The participants were asked to grade the themes as "not relevant", "somewhat relevant", or "very relevant". The analysis of the responses showed that the participants found the overall themes to be very relevant, with the highest grade of nearly 90% allocated to the media and good governance. Only about 2% of the respondents found the topics to be not relevant. There were

differences according to gender; only 81% of the females rated the topics as very relevant compared with 97% of the males. However, at the sub-theme level the relevance seemed much lower. The sub-topics related to the TGN were found to be among the least relevant of all the sub-themes covered in the training programme, which is a concern since the main focus of the training was the use of the TGN.

### Use of Training

Only about half the participants found the training to be useful in their current work, with the TGN statistics and public budgeting sub-themes scoring the highest at 52%. Tackling stories more confidently (23%) and improving their writing by using the TGN statistics (45%) were the top improvements. Related to this, about 20% felt that their articles were longer than before the training, and that they contained more examples from the field (22%). Some examples were provided to back up their assertions.

On the main focus of the training, namely public budgets and expenditures, the majority asserted that the training made a positive impact on their articles pertaining to these two topics. Positive impacts ranged from greater confidence in asking questions about the budget (30%) to a greater acceptance of articles on the budget and expenditures (20%). Another special focus of the training was the use of the TGN. There was an overwhelming increase in the use of the TGN after the training, with nearly 77% of the participants reporting that they used the TGN after the training compared with 19.1% before the training. There was practically no difference according to gender, with 76.7% of the males and 76.5% of the females using the TGN after the training. However, less than 25% were using the TGN at least once a week to prepare their articles or broadcasts.

## Reasons for Differences in Relevance and Use

Based on the data analysis and discussions with senior representatives of the media company owners and other stakeholders, especially those that had been involved in media training, we were able to identify several reasons for the differences in the perception of the relevance of the TGN and its actual use in practice. **First**, in terms of the low relevance of the TGN, the respondents stated that insufficient time had been allocated to the use of the website during the training, thus preventing them from fully understanding the value and relevance of the resource; during a one-day workshop, only one hour was given to the use of the website. After the training the TGN was found to be less useful because there were difficulties in using the website: the available information was out of date and the data was insufficient. A few also found that they had forgotten what they had learned during the training. **Second**, the mix of participants by education and experience resulted in differences in their understanding of how the information they received could be relevant and useful in their work. It is likely that the relevance of the topics to their work would be noticed more quickly by those with higher levels of education and experience. **Third**, it was reported by some of the facilitators that many of the participants were not committed to their profession, and this affected their level of attention during the training.

## Outcomes of the Training

The second objective of the study was to “examine ways in which new knowledge and capacities have been used to influence budgetary and expenditure outcomes and with what effect”. A brief survey of the methods used by other training institutions revealed that the task of pinpointing the specific outcomes of a particular training programme was a challenge.

The present study used three sets of questions to assess outcomes: (i) the extent of follow-ups or queries about any items of the budgets and expenditures at national or local level, done as a result of the training received. The respondents had to give examples of their follow-ups if any, or give their reasons for not doing any; (ii) respondents’ perceptions about improvements in transparency and accountability in public budgets and expenditures brought about by their media work; and (iii) the extent of sharing the training with others, thereby expanding the level of reporting on budgets and expenditures. The analysis found the following results.

(i) Regarding the extent of follow-ups made in response to public budgets and expenditures at national or local level, about 57% of the male respondents and 41% of the females stated that they had made follow-ups. Unfortunately there was no scope to verify these assertions, but the examples provided seemed to give credence to the assertions. The use of the budget as planned in respective sectors and budgetary debates in parliament were two of the most frequently mentioned topics in relation to follow-ups. Most of those that did not follow up the training (60% for females and 40% for males) did not give any reasons for not doing so.

- (ii) Regarding the participants’ perceptions about any improvements to transparency and accountability in public budgets and expenditures as a result from their work, nearly half the respondents (48.9%) reported feeling that their work after the training had contributed towards increasing these two aspects. Again, their assertions were backed up by examples with convincing details that make them credible.
- (iii) With regard to sharing the training with their colleagues, about 80% of the respondents stated that they had shared the training with others. This is a very positive response, but no details were given, so the assertion was less credible than the previous results.

## Conclusion

The REPOA Media Training on public budgets and expenditures by using the Tanzania Governance Noticeboard, carried out in the form of one-day workshops between 2008 and 2010, provided knowledge and skills that the overwhelming majority of the participants had not had access to before the training. The analysis of the data has shown that the training was considered to be highly relevant by the majority of the respondents. The overall use of the TGN increased significantly, but only 25% used it regularly at least once a week due to a number of shortcomings, especially a lack of regular updates to the website and the fact that the data was not comprehensive.

The training has contributed positively towards improving the skills of some of the participants in reporting on public budgets and expenditures, with a number of outstanding examples of positive impacts in terms of enhancing transparency and accounting in public budgets and expenditures, showing that the media can play an effective role in this aspect. The proportion of those who experienced these benefits is less than optimal, but this could easily be increased if the recommendations that have been proposed below can be addressed in future training for the media.

## Recommendations

### **REPOA needs to review the TGN database**

REPOA needs to re-visit the TGN website to ensure that it is up to date, as comprehensive as possible, and user-friendly.

### **Duration of the training should be extended**

Future courses should be extended beyond one day. It is recommended that the period for such training in future should be at least three days, and it should include practical hands-on experience and feedback sessions on the use of the TGN for preparing articles or broadcasts on public budgets and expenditures.

### **Participants should be carefully selected**

The level of participant education, experience, and seniority should be pre-set before the course is designed, and this should be observed strictly during the selection of the participants, so as to obtain a more uniform set of participants. It is also recommended that the selection of participants should involve working with the media owners so as to include participants who are truly committed to the training.

### **There is a need to consider changes in the content of media training**

Although the topics were pertinent, the content could be improved in the following ways: (i) better coverage of the topics, with greater emphasis on ways in which the media could follow up the implementation of the budget; (ii) greater focus on current topics, i.e. those that were making the headlines at the time of the training; (iii) a module on the relationship between the public and the media; (iv) greater emphasis on the situation in rural areas; and (v) ethics and professionalism in the media.

### **The delivery and facilitation methodology should be made more participant-friendly**

The following changes are recommended: (i) there should be a greater mix of methodologies and facilitators; (ii) the language of facilitation must be addressed where necessary, so that the language is matched with the majority of participants; (iii) practical work on using the TGN to write articles or broadcast programmes on public accounting should be part of the training, and assignments should be completed during the training period or within a week after the training ends; and (iv) future training courses should include more participants from outside Dar es Salaam.

## Policy Implications

A number of policy implications arise from these findings and recommendations. First, the government and its partners in the private sector need to improve access to the internet across the country. Currently access is only available in major urban areas, which means that the TGN is difficult to access in rural areas. Second, there is a need for the government to foster greater transparency in access to documents related to public budgets and expenditures. The utility of the TGN depends on the timely availability of such documents. Third, media houses and associations need to work together to increase the level of female participation in the media sector. Male reporters usually tend to seek information and opinions from other males, thereby underplaying the voices of women. Fourth, the government needs to review the legislation pertaining to the right to report, as recommended by the media stakeholders. The revised version needs to be put in place as quickly as possible.

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