

## The Power of Information: Training Young Journalists (Uganda)

### Summary

This project was undertaken in order to equip journalists with skills and techniques for independent investigations and reporting. To build citizen participation in Uganda's current democratic restructuring process, a strong and informed media has a crucial role to play. Citizens should be aware of the significant amounts of money that government is spending on alleviating poverty and should be in a position to monitor these expenditures.

The project, organised by Transparency International Uganda, was implemented in Kisoro District in Uganda between 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004. It consisted of a set of workshops, round-tables and on-site visits. A total of 15 journalists from national print media were trained.

Partnerships were formed with the journalists' associations and other NGOs.<sup>1</sup> Funding was provided by Austrian Development Cooperation and TI-Uganda Secretariat.

### Background

"Some people say, 'there has to be corruption because there is scarcity and they are poor'. This is not true because the richest and the high positioned officers in the society and the government are the most corrupt in Uganda according the investigative news reports in the country. They have diverted funds they have not worked for and hence have shown nothing but reaped a lot. Information is power, whenever you (people of Kisoro) notice any face of corruption coming up, make an alarm and keep the rest informed."

*Dr. Philemon Mateke, Local Council Vice Chairman, at a workshop for Voluntary Anti-corruption Committees, Local Councils, and Medics in Kisoro town on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2004*

After seven years of democratic restructuring, and on the threshold of the 2006 presidential elections, a problematic political environment persists in Uganda. Systems of vertical and horizontal accountability are weak, and corruption is

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1 Anti-Corruption Coalition of Uganda (ACCU), Uganda Journalists Association (UJA), and National Institute of Journalists in Uganda (NIJU)

rampant in many areas of life. There are anti-corruption laws, rules and regulations in the different Acts and the Ugandan Constitution of 1995, but due to illiteracy and lack of awareness among the populace, Ugandans are largely ignorant of these laws and regulations. Most people do not know what roles to play in the fight against corruption, while even many more are unaware of their rights.

Most people are not informed about the funds that they should benefit from, namely the Poverty Eradication Action Plan and Poverty Alleviation Fund. Getting the facts from the public offices to the citizens has been a challenge.

Various audit reports of the period 2000/2003<sup>2</sup> indicate that there is rampant corruption in local government. Corruption threatens to fail goals of decentralisation and the Poverty Alleviation Fund.

Many of Uganda's citizens do not understand the concept of corruption and its corrosive effects on the communities. As discussions with people in Kisoro district (where TI-Uganda has a field office) showed, some people think that corruption helps in attaining things from others who have more than they need. Others believe corruption is a useful tool to speed things up, and some know that corruption has negative effects on others but only consider their own interests at the expense of public good. Unethical behaviour and corruption even is reported on family level: Wives divert part of the money for children's scholastic materials for cosmetics; children make false expenses claims for extra tuition, school trips, loss of school books or damage to school furniture in a bid to get extra pocket money and husbands under declare their salaries to avoid demands from their family.

## **Strengthening the role of the media**

In Uganda, the media lack the freedom and skills to inform others about corruption. The media faces severe constraints from anti-press laws, adversely affecting investigative journalism in the country.

In early 2004 TI-Uganda decided to organise a training session for journalists, aimed at promoting a culture of investigative reporting to enhance accountable governance. The project was built on the premise that a strengthened and informed media is crucial in the process of providing reliable information to citizens, enabling them to participate in the democratic consolidation process.

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2 Reports of the Inspector General of Governing (IGG), the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

## The project

"Transparency Uganda has done a lot to me as an individual. I was a professional journalist before but I did not have any investigative skills at all. Now I can venture in to rather serious corruption investigations and come up with stories and publish them in the print media and seldom in the electronic media without fear of its repercussions on my life."

*Bahizi Ignatius, trainee*

The overall goal of the training was to equip journalists with the necessary skills and techniques of writing investigative stories through research. In particular, the objectives were to

- enhance the capacity of journalists in investigative reporting;
- improve writing and analytical skills;
- enhance the ability of the media to conduct independent research using information technology;
- deepen understanding of the media's oversight function (or watchdog role) in Uganda's democratic consolidation.

## The investigative journalist training

The programme can be summarized in six steps:

- i. Pre-preparation involved drafting of training material, which was reviewed and finalised before training started.
- ii. Preparations also involved identification of prominent trainers from the recognised universities of Uganda, news editors from prominent media organisations, and personnel from the journalist institutes i.e. Uganda Journalists Association and National Institute of Journalists in Uganda.
- iii. A project management team was identified, comprising of a project director and a project officer. Their mandate was to co-ordinate and supervise a technical team of local and international resource persons and provide administrative support.
- iv. A seven-member panel selected 15 journalists from the electronic and print media through a formal application process. The applicants had to demonstrate a commitment to and interest in investigative journalism and had to have practiced for a minimum of four years. A strategic qualitative selection process favouring journalists from the print media based in Kampala was applied to identify eight journalists from Kampala and seven from the provinces.

- v. The date for the actual training was fixed, and the one-week training commenced on the 16th and ended on 22nd May 2004. The training sessions involved:
- Two one-day workshops with the themes Techniques of Investigation and Computer Assisted Reporting and Applying Techniques of Investigative Journalism in Specified Areas (Finance, Health, Environment etc). The workshops tackled the anatomy of corruption, conflict of interest case studies, and differences in investigation between journalism, security services, and oversight bodies (i.e. Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, the Inspectorate of Government, and Internal Security Organisation)
  - A one-day seminar, Challenges to Effective Investigative Reporting, in which journalists were equipped with knowledge about the economic and social environment, public access and privacy, media ethics and legalities.
  - A three-day round table session tackling issues including globalisation and media oversight in democratic consolidation, campaign finance and corruption and peer reviews.
  - An on-site visit to local government departments of Water, Education, and the Chief Administrative Officer's office. Further investigation on the projects/ offices visited was completed by the trainees and published in the local print media.



Trainees visiting a water project in Kisoro

The training ended with awarding of certificates to trainees and all participants receiving additional information.

- vi. During six months after the training, distance-counselling and evaluation of trainees' performance was completed by a participating university professor. Trainees' stories were assessed with regard to their depth and relevance, and impact on local government. The counsellor/ evaluator then issued a final report to TI Uganda.

## Results

"The entire management team of NIYO Construction Company sent our sincere apologies to the Kisoro District Tender Board regarding the rather negative news reports in the media that has portrayed the company in a negative light. The shoddy works in the schools named in the articles of the Monitor newspaper of June 24<sup>th</sup> will there fore be redone. We regret any inconvenience caused as we check the particular engineers who were assigned in the sites already mentioned. For God and my Country."

*Letter addressed to the District Tender Board Chairman by NIYO Construction*

During the training, journalists had unveiled several cases of local corruption that all appeared in the local press. This had some immediate consequences, for example, the local NIYO Construction Company formally filed an apology



Presentation of certificates by TI-Uganda chairman

in the District Tender Board office for their shoddy work in school construction and committed to rebuilding the faulty building.

After hearing a newspaper report and a live radio talk show, students from Kitwamba, in Kasese District, attacked their head teacher for violating their rights to go for extra curricular activities, locking him up in a room to question him about what he had done with the funds allocated for that. The Local Defence Units rescued him and vowed to investigate the issue.

Overall, the evaluation shows that the training has produced more accurate and reliable information and an enhanced appreciation of the watchdog role of the media in Uganda's democratic consolidation efforts. In addition, there are promising signs of the emergence of an Investigative Reporters Association, which would help to promote independent and skilled investigative journalism in Uganda.

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A report on the training is available as a hard copy.

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