

ACME moves to strengthen reporting numbers in Uganda

By [Walter Wafula](#)

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News with statistics in Uganda is expected to become more meaningful to its recipients following a move by the African Centre for Media Excellence to sharpen the skills of local journalists.



The organisation has started training local journalists on how to report statistics in the news through the "Numbers and the News" programme, according to Grace Natabaalo, the programme associate, at the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME).

The first batch of 15 reporters to benefit from the training will be trained on Wednesday, 23 June 2011 in Kampala. This will follow a similar training session held to equip up to 25 editors in various newsrooms in Kampala with similar skills in April. Two more training sessions are planned for 27 June and 1 July 2011.

Misrepresenting facts, distorting information

According to Peter Mwesige the executive director of ACME, the programme is aimed at improving the skills of journalists in reporting numbers so that readers can make sense of them when they are reported in stories. He notes that Ugandan media is littered with numerous numerical inaccuracies which misrepresent facts and distort information.

"Some journalists get the numbers right, but the reader would require a Ph.D in economics or statistics to make sense of them. Their writing is simply not accessible and is often devoid of context.

"Others avoid numbers altogether, making it difficult for their audiences to make comparisons or understand claims, for instance, of increases or decreases in all manner of areas," Mwesige says on the organisation's website.

According to the ED, journalists cannot run away from numbers because much of what they report is based on them. Major national stories that the press in Uganda report, like elsewhere in the world, involve; election results, government budgets, corruption scandals, economic forecasts, population growth and prices of commodities.

Specialist to help with numbers

To improve reporting statistics in Kenya, the Nation Media Group, with operations in three other East African nations including; Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, recently hired a specialist to help its journalists deal with numbers.

Commenting on the development, Mwesige said, hiring a specialist to cross-check stories for numerical accuracy is a stop-gap measure. "One long-term solution would be newsroom and workshop-based training coupled with a sustained engagement between reporters and their editors on their attitudes towards numbers."

"Journalists don't have to be or become mathematical geniuses, but they can and should improve their skills in reporting about numbers," he adds.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

Walter Wafula is a seasoned journalist who has reported for the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in Kampala-Uganda. He is also a contributor on Bizcommunity.com website. Email Walter at wafwalt@yahoo.com and connect on LinkedIn.

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