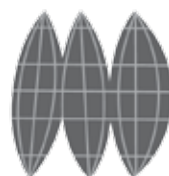


# SOWING THE SEEDS

A Study of Media Coverage of Agriculture and  
Women in the Agricultural Sector in Three African  
Countries: Mali, Uganda and Zambia

February 2009



**IWMMF**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MEDIA FOUNDATION

“In the modern globalising world, information sows the seeds of prosperity, and those without access to information are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to building a better future for themselves and for their children.”

*Shashi Tharoor, then U.N. Under-Secretary General for Communication and Public Information from his keynote speech at the 2005 Global Forum on Media for Development in Amman, Jordan.*

## Foreword

The opportunity to develop more and better agricultural news coverage in Africa, and women's roles within it, is both extraordinary and natural for the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). As a vibrant global network of news media women and men, we pioneer innovative approaches to media training on global issues, always breaking ground to bring women journalists to the forefront of improving lives.

In Africa, agriculture is a key story that needs to be at the top of the news agenda. Women produce 70 percent of the continent's agricultural output and are therefore central to the story. This report documents the scant attention that both agriculture and women agriculturalists have received from news media in Mali, Uganda and Zambia. In 2008, the IWMF entered into a training relationship with six news media houses in these three countries to provide sustained in-house training over a three-year period. Local journalists with expertise in science and agriculture are serving as the trainers. We are proud to be in partnership with these media houses that have been named Centers of Excellence for the project: *L'Essor* and Radio Klédu in Mali, *The Daily Monitor* and the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation in Uganda, and *The Times* and the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation in Zambia.

This report will aid curriculum development and training and serve as a baseline for the project. We want to see the number and quality of stories on agriculture increase, and look forward, as well, to counting growing numbers of women – both as reporters and as news sources – with a voice in critical policy, scientific, socioeconomic and technical stories on the subject of agriculture.

On behalf of the IWMF, I thank the Howard G. Buffett Foundation for the grant that has allowed us to undertake this project. I thank the project's guiding members from our board and advisory council – Akwe Amosu, Tom Mshindi, Emily Nwankwo, Lynn Povich and Carolan Stiles – for their wisdom, time and enthusiasm.

I also thank Gifti Nadi, the IWMF's senior program officer for Africa, for providing overall coordination, as well as senior staff members Elisa Munoz, director of training and research; Kimberly Robinson, director of finance and administration; and Kathleen Currie, deputy director. In South Africa, Paula Fray and Pat Made of *frayintermedia* headed the research team along with Mwika Malindima (Zambia), Nakayiwa Ssonko and Colleen Lawson (Uganda), and Tidiane Kasse (Mali), who led the monitoring in the three countries. Finally, I would like to thank the Media Monitoring Project (South Africa) – since renamed Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) – for conducting the data analysis and Libba Conger for editing the report.

Jane B. Ransom  
IWMF Executive Director

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# Introduction

**S**ub-Saharan Africa is a region of farmers. Most of the people are engaged in the agricultural sector; most live in the rural areas; most are poor. And the majority of Africa's farmers – and by extension, the majority of Africa's poor – are women.

The International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) recently examined African media coverage of agriculture as well as coverage of women within the agricultural sector in three Sub-Saharan African countries: Mali, Uganda and Zambia. The core finding was the existence of a profound “disconnect:” specifically, in the three countries studied, media coverage reflects *exactly the opposite* of most people's everyday lives. For example:

- **Just 4 percent of all media coverage monitored by the study was devoted to agriculture.** Yet agriculture makes up 34 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP and 40 percent of the region's exports, and it accounts for 70 percent of total employment.

- **Whether female or male, farmers' voices were in the minority in agricultural coverage.** In the agricultural stories monitored, 70 percent of the sources were government officials and “experts/professionals” (e.g., city-based academicians, business executives and U.N. officials). Just 20 percent were farmers and other rural, agricultural workers.

- **Women were almost invisible in the media.** In the agricultural coverage monitored, the study found that just 11 percent of the sources were women, 22 percent of the reporters were women, and women were focal points of just 7 percent of the stories. Yet women produce 70 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's food and make up half of the region's population.

- **Fully 84 percent of the agricultural coverage focused on breaking news; little coverage took the forms of analysis, in-depth features, investigative pieces and farmer education.** In the words of one Zambian reporter, editors define stories as breaking news if, for example, “the president is there, or if people have died of starvation, or there are donations to affected victims.” Yet given the region's profound poverty (50 percent of the people live below the World Bank's “absolute poverty” line) and widespread malnutrition (31 percent) as well as its decades-long decline in per capita food production, experts agree that every possible attention, including media attention, must be paid to agricultural development.

Money and expertise were cited as the two missing links. In other words, inadequate agricultural reporting in the three countries studied is not *primarily* a result of bias, although gender bias and the traditional editorial bent toward breaking news do play significant roles. Most study participants (journalists, editors, media consumers and, of course, farmers)

In the words of one Zambian reporter, editors define stories as breaking news if, for example, “the president is there, or if people have died of starvation, or there are donations to affected victims.”

Money and expertise were cited as the two missing links. In other words, “disconnected” agricultural reporting in the three study countries is not primarily a result of choice, although gender bias and the traditional editorial bent toward breaking news do play significant roles. Instead, most study participants (journalists, editors, media consumers and, of course, farmers) said they want better agricultural coverage.

said they want better agricultural coverage. But more often than not, journalists and editors work in cash-strapped newsrooms, racing against deadlines and barely keeping the news production flowing. They lack the additional journalists and crews, funds for field investigations, and opportunities for expert training that agricultural reporting, in its full magnitude and complexity, demands.

The goal of improved agricultural coverage is not only better coverage per se, but also a healthier agricultural sector. Time and again, it has been shown that the media can directly advance social and economic development. A study of the media in India, for example, found that “states with higher levels of media development are more active in protecting vulnerable citizens” (Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November 2002). “Media Matters,” a report by Internews and the Global Forum on Media Development, suggested that “just ... accessing media, in particular radio, is enough to have a significant effect” – exposing developing populations to information and resources that can transform their lives. The African Media Development Initiative, a study conducted by the BBC World Service Trust and published in 2006, pointed out that “fostering a stronger media in Africa is an indispensable part of tackling poverty, improving development and enabling Africa to attain its development goals.”

*Sowing the Seeds* represents the first phase of a four-year IWMF project, *Reporting on Women and Agriculture: Africa*, funded by the U.S.-based Howard G. Buffett Foundation. Focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, the project seeks to increase and enhance reporting on agriculture, incorporate women’s roles in the coverage of agriculture and rural development, and improve gender equality in newsrooms. This report supports the project’s media training at selected sites in Mali, Uganda and Zambia, launched February 23, 2009.



# Missing Voices: Meet Cecilia Makota

**C**ecilia Violet Makota, now in her late 70s, has been a farmer for more than 20 years. Her farm is just outside Lusaka, the Zambian capital city, and often has served as the venue for farmer-training “field days,” agricultural companies’ product-launch events, and other public occasions. Makota herself is as spry as they come, maintaining a busy schedule as both farmer and entrepreneur.

As a part of the current study, IWMF researchers sought to interview successful women farmers. The team asked local journalists for recommendations. In Zambia, almost every journalist who was asked recommended Makota. So the researcher in Zambia sought out this remarkable woman, and Makota graciously agreed.

Right away she dropped a bombshell. When asked about her engagement with the media, Makota said, “I have never been interviewed by the media. I have never been interviewed about agriculture. This is the first time.”

Why had so many journalists known of Makota but never interviewed her? The media, she explained, had often visited her farm for public events. “But the media focus on the companies and what they are saying, and not on me.”

In fact, Makota had a lot to say about the role the media can and should play in conveying essential information to women farmers nationwide. “The media need to talk about the problems women farmers have in acquiring title deeds to land as well as the problems they face in getting access to collateral and credit. They also need information on methods of farming, such as conservation farming, intercropping and new technology,” she said.

She believes community media and media produced in local languages are the most effective ways to reach farmers, especially the women farmers who most need information on agriculture. “The use of mobile media [field reporters, traveling TV crews, etc.] which can reach all the people, to talk to the farmers at their base using their languages, would be informative.”

Makota finds media coverage of agriculture to be lacking. She observed, “The stories are not very informative, and the media do not give agriculture a lot of attention. When there is a crisis, the coverage of agriculture is increased. Normally the media overlook agriculture issues.”

How would Makota improve the reporting? Reporters need to get out from behind their desks, forego the press conferences and official statements, and go where the action is. “The reporters do not travel to the farming communities where agriculture is,” she noted. “There is a need to physically go to the rural areas to get the real stories.”

Women produce 70 percent of Africa’s food. Yet in the three target countries studied, where women produce the majority of food, women are the focus of just 7 percent of agricultural media coverage. Women’s stories are the missing stories – women’s voices, the missing voices – of African farming.

# Context:

## Agriculture, Women and the Media in Sub-Saharan Africa

**R**ural and agriculturally based, Sub-Saharan Africa has, for decades, been the poorest region on earth. Experts have long agreed that African poverty alleviation must begin in the rural areas and within the agricultural sector, effectively transforming Africa's weakest, yet largest, demographic into the driver of the continent's prosperity. And women, who make up half of the population but have few economic supports, are the underutilized human resource. If empowered, they could fuel an agricultural revolution.

**Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa:** As the year 2009 begins, what has been termed the "world food crisis" continues unabated. "The prices of maize, wheat, rice and other crops have more than doubled over the past two years," explained the International Food Policy Research Institute's Nicholas Minot in a briefing before the U.S. House of Representatives' Hunger Caucus (June 5, 2008). The further economic downturns of late 2008 only worsened that situation. And while the world food crisis by definition is affecting almost all countries, Reuters reported that a "World Bank study ... suggested that up to 105 million people could become poor due to rising food prices, close to 30 million of them in Africa alone" (June 4, 2008). In other words, with just 12 percent of the world population but 29 percent of the aforementioned *new* poor, Sub-Saharan Africa will be affected disproportionately.

Sadly, those 30 million new poor will have a lot of company: namely, Africa's longer-standing poor, who now number 390 million people.

What has caused such poverty?

Floods, droughts, civil wars, disease epidemics and famines have regularly captured world attention. There was the Africa-wide drought of the mid-1980s and the decades of struggle against South African apartheid. Today, we witness genocide in Darfur, Sudan; we see HIV/AIDS ravage Southern Africa; and we see the world food crisis as it affects Africa. Those are some of the dramatic crises.

And then, there are the quieter crises, no less deadly for their lack of drama. Agriculture in Africa is in a state of quiet crisis. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, "Per capita food production has declined in Africa for the past 30 years and farm productivity in Africa is just one-quarter the global average." Over these same 30 years, in every other world region, per capita food production has increased.

- **One result of insufficient agricultural production is hunger.** The FAO goes on to note, "Today, more than 200 million people are chronically hungry in the [African] region, and 33 million children under age five are malnourished." See *Table 1*.

### AGRICULTURE MATTERS

"African leaders will take joint responsibility for ... promoting the development of infrastructure, agriculture and its diversification into agro-industries and manufacturing to serve both domestic and export markets."

– African Union, "New African Partnership for Development (NEPAD)," article 49

"Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger."

– United Nations, 2008 Millennium Development Goals

**TABLE 1: UNDERNOURISHED POPULATION**

Europe	6%
Latin America and Caribbean	10%
<b>Africa</b>	<b>31%</b>
Eastern Mediterranean	18%
South East Asia	18%
Western Pacific	12%

Source: "World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health," p. 47, U.N. World Food Program. Undernourishment prevalence in total population (all developing and transition countries).

**TABLE 2: POPULATION IN ABSOLUTE POVERTY**

Latin America and Caribbean	8.2%
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>50.4%</b>
Middle East and North Africa	4.6%
South Asia	40.3%
East Asia and Pacific	15.9%
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	5%

Source: "The Developing World Is Poorer Than We Thought, But No Less Successful in the Fight Against Poverty," p. 31, The World Bank Development Research Group, August 2008. NOTE: In this report, the World Bank announced it was changing its standard measure of "absolute poverty" from U.S.\$1/day to U.S.\$1.25/day. The table above is based upon the new \$1.25/day standard.

• Another result is poverty, because Sub-Saharan Africa's economy is predominantly rural and agriculturally based. Some 65 percent of the people live in the rural areas. About 70 percent are engaged in agriculture. Agriculture accounts for 40 percent of the region's exports and 34 percent of its GDP (David Love, Steve Twomlow, Walter Mupangwa, Pieter van der Zaag and Bekithemba Gumbo, "Implementing the Millennium Development Food Security Goals – Challenges of the Southern African Context," (*Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* 31 (2006): 731-737). As population grows, as environmental pressures increase, as already scarce funds must be diverted from agricultural development to the overwhelming crisis of HIV/AIDS, it is no wonder that half of all Sub-Saharan Africans today live in absolute poverty. See Table 2.

The international community has been responding to Africa's dual agricultural challenges – the current "world food crisis" and the longer-standing problem of insufficient per capita food production – along the lines proposed in early 2008 at a U.N. World Food Program summit. It involves "a twin-track approach aimed at immediately alleviating the impact of high food and fuel prices on the weakest population groups through direct transfers

and safety nets; and promoting agricultural and rural development both in the short and long run, especially in poorer countries" (U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

**Women in African agriculture:** Women make up 50% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa. But according to the FAO, they constitute 70 to 80% of the region's agricultural workforce and are responsible for:

- 70 percent of food production,
- 100 percent of food processing,
- 50 percent of animal husbandry, and
- 60 percent of agricultural marketing.

A U.N. Millennium Development Goals report states, "Agriculture has become increasingly feminized."

Despite their disproportionately large contributions to agriculture, women have far less access than men to

technology, other inputs, training, credit and land – agricultural resources across the board. According to the above U.N. report, “Women own less than 2 percent of all land and receive only 5 percent of extension services worldwide. It is estimated that women in Africa receive less than 10 percent of all credit going to small farmers and a mere 1 percent of the total credit going to the agricultural sector.”

The U.N. report concludes, “Overall, the neglect of women’s needs and rights undermines the potential of entire communities to grow and develop. Poverty is therefore deeply rooted in the glaring imbalance between what women do and what they have – in terms of both assets and rights. As the status of women increases, so do the benefits to society.”

**Africa’s media:** In much of the developing world, government decentralization and economic privatization over the past two decades have resulted in a media sector that is now far more dynamic, crowded, complex – in a word, democratic – than ever before.

Some of the reforms include media-friendly regulatory environments, media-training institutes that (try to) meet journalists’ real needs, and professional watchdog groups by and for the media themselves. In Sub-Saharan Africa generally, media output has evolved from top-down, government-driven messaging to diverse programming driven by the private sector. Particularly in radio, new spaces are opening up for public discourse and civic engagement. Of special note are grassroots, or bottom-up, community media networks and associations.

Undeniably positive, the African media’s democratization also has had a downside. What is termed “media-for-development” (social messaging media, i.e., programming designed as a development tool) has weakened as public interest media, once the mandate of the state, has all but collapsed. No longer monopolies, state media have undergone severe budget cuts; they struggle for audience share against hundreds of new outlets; and hoping to remain financially viable, they are shifting away from public interest programming and toward “commercial” content. Media-for-development, in other words, is drying up. And to the extent that poor, rural communities have less development-oriented information, their effective participation in national advancement is hindered as well.

“In the modern globalizing world, information sows the seeds of prosperity, and those without access to information are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to building a better future for themselves and for their children,” stated then U.N. Under-Secretary General for Communication and Public Information, Shashi Tharoor, in his keynote speech at the 2005 Global Forum on Media for Development in Amman, Jordan.

Media-for-development is still perceived as essential and is often promoted by those who also campaign for media freedom. Africans do not want to leave public interest media behind. But in these transitional times, both private-sector and government-run media lack the capacity, including the funding and the training, to produce good public-interest content.

In short, while Africa’s media have diversified and made great gains in credibility since the late 1980s, they face a further challenge today as issues like food shortage, HIV/AIDS and poverty demand far more journalistic attention with in-depth, analytical and investigative coverage than ever before.

## WOMEN MATTER

“African leaders will take joint responsibility for ... promoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training; by developing revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit; and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries.”

– African Union, 2001 “New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD),” article 49

“Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.”

– United Nations, 2008  
Millennium Development Goals

## THE MEDIA MATTER

“Across the continent, democracy is spreading, backed by the African Union (AU), which has shown a new resolve to deal with conflicts and censure deviation from the norm. These efforts are reinforced by voices in civil society, including associations of women, youth and the independent media ....”

– African Union, “New African Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD),” article 7

“Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development. ... Target 5: in cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.”

– United Nations, 2008 Millennium Development Goals

THE COUNTRIES STUDIED		
MALI	UGANDA	ZAMBIA
<p><b>Region:</b> West Africa  <b>Capital city:</b> Bamako  <b>Official language:</b> French (Bambara is spoken by 80 percent of the people; other major languages are Arabic and Berber)  <b>Population:</b> 12 million  <b>Land area:</b> 482,077 square miles (1.25 million square kms)</p>	<p><b>Region:</b> East Africa  <b>Capital city:</b> Kampala  <b>Official languages:</b> English and Swahili (also widespread are Luganda and various Bantu languages)  <b>Population:</b> 30 million  <b>Land area:</b> 93,072 square miles (241,038 square kilometers)</p>	<p><b>Region:</b> Southern Africa  <b>Capital city:</b> Lusaka  <b>Official language:</b> English (other major languages include Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga)  <b>Population:</b> 11.7 million  <b>Land area:</b> 290,586 square miles (752,614 square kilometers)</p>
<p>The Republic of Mali is one of the world's poorest countries: the fifth least-developed, according to the U.N. Development Program's 2007/2008 Human Development Index, which ranks 177 countries worldwide. Nevertheless, Mali enjoys food self-sufficiency and, since 1992, a relatively stable, democratic government. Most of the farming, which occupies 80 percent of the population, takes place in the fertile Niger River basin. Otherwise, less than 4 percent of the land is arable; and 65 percent of the land is either desert or semidesert, astride the Sahara. A 10th of the people are nomads, who move with their livestock herds throughout those arid lands.</p> <p>Mali's broadcast and print media are among the freest in Africa. In addition to the former government-controlled radio and television broadcasting company, Mali has more than 200 radio stations, several private television stations, and more than 100 independent newspapers as well as journals published in French, Arabic and various local languages. (Source: <i>African Media Development Initiative, BBC World Service Trust, 2006</i>)</p>	<p>Densely populated, mountainous and rainy, the Republic of Uganda was once called "the pearl of Africa." Off and on since independence, the country has been plagued by political instability. Nevertheless, a stable, democratically elected government has made tremendous strides since 1986. Economically, Uganda has experienced solid growth since the 1990s. Widely hailed, the government's HIV/AIDS-control campaign has helped reduce prevalence of the virus from up to 30% at one point during the 1990s to about 5.5 percent today. Uganda has substantial natural resources, including fertile soils and sizable deposits of copper and cobalt. Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy, employing over 80% of the workforce.</p> <p>Although Uganda's media are largely urban-focused, this East African nation has seen the development of a more independent media over the past 15 years. Today, only a few outlets remain under government ownership and control. Radio, with more than 80 stations, is the most geographically diverse of the media; in rural areas, radio has a stronger presence than either television or print media. (Source: <i>African Media Development Initiative, BBC World Service Trust, 2006</i>)</p>	<p>Like most of Southern Africa, the Republic of Zambia today has HIV/AIDS prevalence rates that are among the highest in the world. Most Zambians depend on farming, although only 7 percent of the land is arable. Since before independence, Zambia's economic destiny has been driven by copper, with which it is richly endowed. In 1975, world copper prices collapsed, devastating the country's economy. More recently, copper earnings have improved. Nevertheless, Zambia has been working to reduce overdependence on that volatile revenue source.</p> <p>Zambia's broadcast media landscape has changed significantly in the last eight years. While the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation continues to be the national broadcaster, the number of private and community radio stations continues to grow. There were only 12 radio stations in 2000; by 2005, radio stations numbered more than 26. In addition, 2000–2005 saw increased advocacy by in-country media support organizations. That timeframe also saw significant reforms of broadcast media laws. (Source: <i>African Media Development Initiative, BBC World Service Trust, 2006</i>)</p>

# The Study Structure

**I**nitial survey: In August 2007, the IWMF e-mailed an initial survey to more than 1,150 people from the following sectors: journalism, media training, NGOs, universities, corporations, multilateral organizations, government agencies, public/private service providers and funders. More than 100 individuals from over 20 countries in Africa and beyond responded. Most were editors or journalists at news organizations. Overall, they rated the current coverage of agriculture and women in the agricultural sector as “fair” (as opposed to “good” or “excellent”).

**The study:** The principal study, the subject of this report, took place during early 2008 in three Sub-Saharan African countries: Mali, Uganda and Zambia. The countries have relatively free media environments and dominant agricultural sectors; in addition, they represent two of the continent’s major languages (English and French) and three of the major regions (West, East and Southern Africa).

## MEDIA MONITORED

### TELEVISION

- *Office de radiodiffusion et de télévision du Mali: ORTM-TV*
- Nation TV (Uganda)
- Uganda Broadcasting Corporation: UBC-TV
- Wavah Broadcasting Services (Uganda)
- Muvi TV (Zambia)
- Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation: ZNBC-TV

### RADIO

- Radio Klédu (Mali)
- *Office de radiodiffusion et de télévision du Mali: ORTM-Radio*
- Central Broadcasting Service: CBS-Radio (Uganda)
- Radio Simba (Uganda)
- Star FM (Uganda)
- Uganda Broadcasting Corporation: UBC-Radio
- Radio Phoenix (Zambia)
- Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation: ZNBC Radio 1 & Radio 2

### PRINT

- Agriculture magazine by the private association, *Graine d’Espoir* (Mali)
- *Les Echos* (Mali)
- *L’Essor* (Mali)
- *The Daily Monitor* (Uganda)
- *New Vision* (Uganda)
- *The Weekly Observer* (Uganda)
- *The Post* (Zambia)
- *Times of Zambia/Sunday Times*

The study examined African media coverage of agriculture as well as coverage of women within the agricultural sector. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data gathering were employed. The *quantitative research* took the form of media monitoring. In consultation with local researchers, the IWMF team chose 22 media outlets on the basis of their reach, frequency, size and language services – also ensuring a mix of government, private and community ownership (see list). The monitoring spanned the one-month periods of Feb. 8 through March 8 (Uganda and Zambia) and March 3 through 14 (Mali), 2008. The *qualitative research* got behind the numbers to ask “why?” to understand audience needs and responses, and to identify examples of good coverage and the factors that influence it. In the three countries, a total of 32 semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions (with a total of 14 participants) were conducted with media practitioners, media trainers, agricultural experts and members of civil society (including male and female farmers). The qualitative research, during March and April 2008, followed the quantitative research.

### Limitations of the study:

- The balance of data among the different media – print, radio and television – was not identical in each country due to the composition of the media within the countries.
- Resource and time constraints affected the researchers’ ability to conduct focus group discussions with members of farming communities, farming associations and community groups outside the capital cities.
- The exact error of measurement, usually calculated in content analysis by a reliability test (in which different

people code the same material and then project leaders compare the different codings), was not possible due to limited resources and logistical constraints.

- The criteria for selection of the monitors, the monitors’ training, an instructive monitoring guidebook, and periodic checks on the collection of data during the monitoring period all helped to ensure “clean” data from the field.

# The Study:

## Sowing the Seeds

**I**n Sub-Saharan Africa, where 70 percent of the people work in the agricultural sector – most as smallholder or subsistence farmers (and most being women) – does media coverage square with the demographics or are the media out of sync? Answer: the latter.

This study, conducted during 2008 by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), assessed how Africa's media cover agriculture, including women in the agricultural sector. In the three countries studied, journalism was found to be urban- and male-focused and dominated by issues and types of stories that are *exactly the opposite* of most people's everyday realities.

In the three countries studied, journalism was found to be urban- and male-focused and dominated by issues and types of stories that are *exactly the opposite* of most people's everyday realities.

- Agriculture received just 4 percent of all media coverage monitored by this study.
- Most of that scant agricultural coverage was devoted to official news, crises and other subjects outside the scope of the average farmer's daily life.
- And the voices and stories of small farmers, especially women, were almost entirely missing.

Stated one study participant, George Otim, assistant commissioner for Animal Industry and Fisheries within the Ugandan Ministry of Agriculture, "Coverage is minimal and coverage of women in agriculture is simply not there."

## The Media Disconnect

The study monitored media coverage in three Sub-Saharan African countries: Mali, Uganda and Zambia. In total, 23 media outlets – print, radio and television – were monitored. The monitoring spanned one month. A total of 5,879 stories were picked up and analyzed. (For details, see "The Study Structure," page 11.)

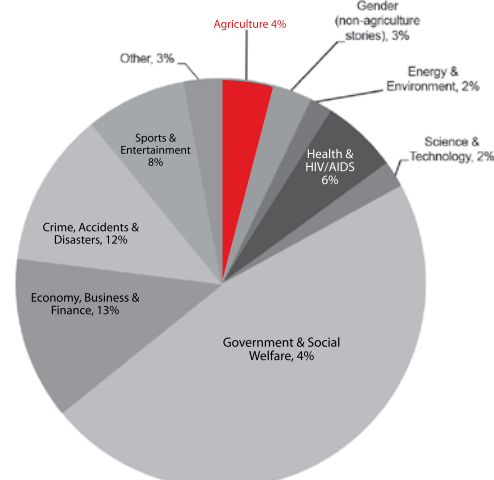
**Little coverage of agriculture:** Typically, just 260 of those stories (or 4 percent) were about "agriculture." In contrast, "government, legal and social welfare issues" received more attention than any other topic: it was the subject of 2,765 stories (or 47 percent of all coverage). The second-most covered topics were "economy, business and finance" (13 percent) and "crime, accidents and disasters" (12 percent). Table 3 shows coverage by topic.

The topical ranking held true when analyzed both by country and by medium.

- When viewed by country, the "agriculture" topic garnered only a small fraction of total media coverage: Mali (9 percent), Uganda (3 percent) and Zambia (4 percent). In those same countries, "government, legal and social welfare issues" received the most coverage: Mali (35 percent), Uganda (58 percent) and Zambia (37 percent).

**Table 3.**

**MALI, UGANDA & ZAMBIA**  
Agriculture averages just 4% of all media coverage



Source: During February and March 2008, the IWMF monitored media coverage (selected print, radio and TV outlets) in three African countries (Mali, Uganda and Zambia). Data were captured for a total of 5,879 stories, of which 260 focused on agriculture. The chart above composites the data for all three countries and for all types of media.

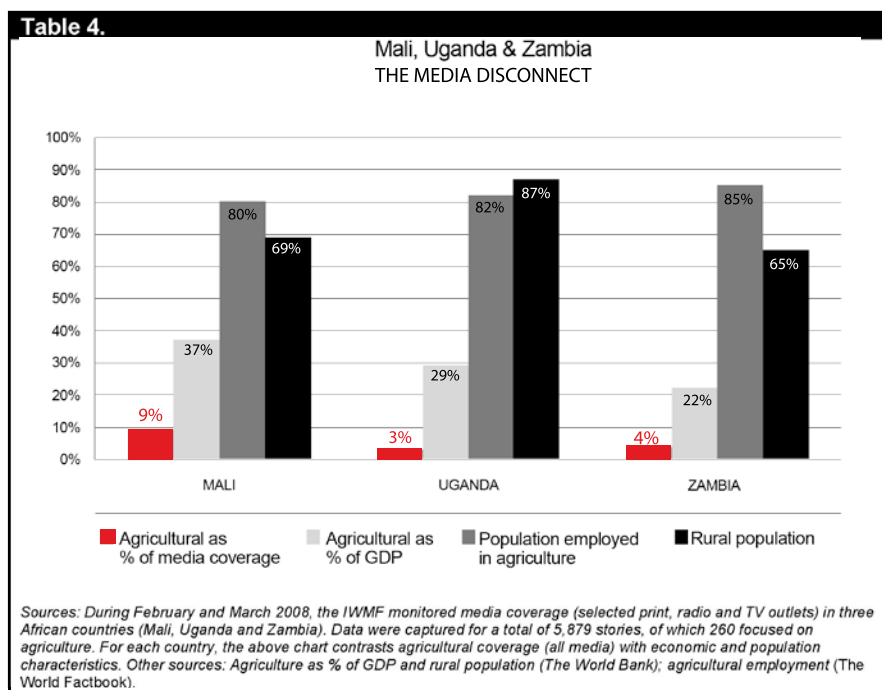
- When viewed by medium, the “agriculture” topic received the same relatively low level of coverage: print (5 percent), radio (3 percent) and television (6 percent). “Government, legal and social welfare issues” again received the most coverage: print (45 percent), radio (51 percent) and television (46 percent). *NOTE: Because of its ability to reach farmers with information in their own languages, radio is considered a powerful media tool for rural development. However, radio in its great diversity and scope could not be properly assessed by this short study. The IWMMF research team recommended repeating the content analysis at different times to capture more definitive data about radio.*

**Agriculture “not considered newsworthy:”** Journalists and editors had mixed observations when asked by the IWMMF study team about the news value of agriculture.

“Yes, agricultural stories are newsworthy,” said Siaka Traore, chief editor and news editor of Mali’s Radio Kayira. “Even though we don’t have an agriculture section or specialized journalists on this topic, our radio station often covers agriculture and related issues. We also have a network of decentralized radio stations that are located in the provincial areas ... where agriculture is a key activity: for example, in Nioro, where rice is cultivated, and in Koutiala and Kita, where cotton is growing. These local radio stations have their own programs and an important part of them is focused on agriculture.”

Most other interviewees *themselves* valued agricultural topics but observed that agriculture is not *generally* valued in their newsrooms or in the broader journalistic environment. “Agriculture is not considered newsworthy,” said Doreen Ndeezi, a radio manager at the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation. Ronald Kalyango, a journalist at the Ugandan newspaper, *New Vision*, pointed out that “there is an editorial attitude focused on what is going to sell, and agriculture is not featured highly on this list. ... Agriculture

is considered a newsworthy topic only 10 percent of the time.” Yvette Tembo, a sub-editor at the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation, went on to explain an unwritten rule in her newsroom: when there is a choice between issues, politics and economics come first. On the other hand, agriculture is “maybe number three or four,” Tembo said. “So if there is an agriculture story and a political meeting where the president is, we run the political story. ... This news value has been engraved in us.”



Yet the perception of agriculture’s “news value” runs counter to economic and social realities, as demonstrated in Table 4.

## Agricultural Coverage Overview

After determining where agriculture ranks in the African media hierarchy, the three-country study went on to analyze the 260 agricultural stories themselves.

Eleven principal topics emerged:

1. **Finance, economics and trade:** 23 percent
2. **Crops and livestock:** 21 percent
3. **Environment:** 14 percent
4. **Human rights and labor:** 9 percent
5. **Types of farming:** 9 percent
6. **Farm inputs (seeds, fertilizer, livestock, equipment, etc.):** 7 percent
7. **Value-added activities (for example, food processing):** 7 percent
8. **Local events and people:** 4 percent
9. **Land tenure and ownership:** 3 percent
10. **Agricultural policy and other government matters:** 2 percent
11. **Other:** 1 percent

That topical hierarchy held true from country to country as well as across all three types of media monitored, with only slight variations. The two topics, “finance, economics and trade” and “crops and livestock,” consistently received the bulk of attention.

Overwhelmingly, the agricultural stories were focused locally:

- **National (in the country):** 92 percent
- **Regional (elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa):** 2 percent
- **International (outside Sub-Saharan Africa):** 6 percent

As to genre, **news stories accounted for 84 percent of the agricultural coverage.** Explained Yvette Tembo of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation, “Agriculture ... will only be assigned for news coverage or be aired if the president is there, or if people have died of starvation, or there are donations to affected victims.” In other words, agriculture per se ranks low on the African media’s coverage-worthiness scale, but the exception is agricultural news.

“Agriculture ... will only be assigned for news coverage or be aired if the president is there, or if people have died of starvation, or there are donations to affected victims.” (Yvette Tembo, Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation). In other words, agriculture per se ranks low on the coverage-worthiness scale, but the exception is agricultural news.

In addition to a story’s genre, there was the factor of its placement within the publication or TV/radio programming. In the print media in Mali, Uganda and Zambia, many agricultural stories did appear on pages labeled “farming” or the like; but **most agricultural stories were mainstreamed as national or local news or as business coverage.** For example, in Uganda, a proposed Land Amendment Bill, as well as the government’s start of a livestock census, dominated the news in all media; both stories, however, were variously reported as national or local news. Zambia’s *The Post* newspaper carries a large number of its agricultural stories in “The Business Post” (the paper’s business, economics and finance section); “Business Post” reporters also write the articles for “The Farming Post” (a quarterly supplement). In contrast, Mali’s private daily, *Le Républicain*, has a section on agriculture, and *Les Echos*, also an independent daily in Mali, has a column called “Rural Area.”

Finally, the study determined the number of sources for each of the 260 agriculture stories. Sources included people as well as documents and other organizational announcements, although most sources (94 percent) were people.

- **Average number of sources per agricultural story: 1.7**

That low number remained relatively consistent across all three media and each of the three countries studied. In effect, most agricultural stories were single-sourced.

# Missing Voices: Farmers

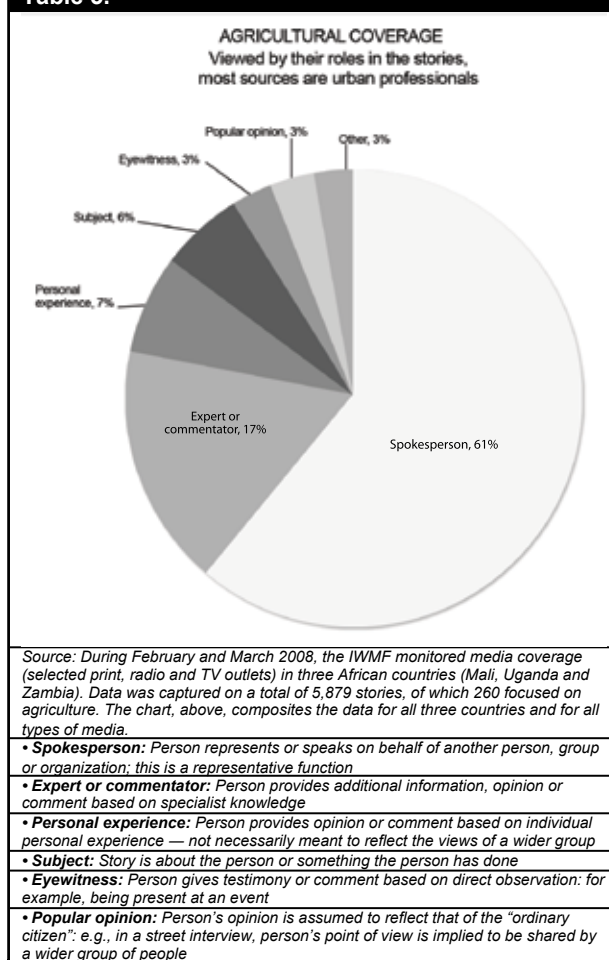
Although most of the people of Mali, Uganda and Zambia (and most of the people of Sub-Saharan Africa) are smallholder or subsistence farmers who live in the rural areas, between 70 and 80 percent of the agricultural stories' sources – most of the voices – were urban professionals.

The 260 agricultural stories analyzed in this study had 423 sources. Of those, 26 were not people: rather, they were documents, videos and other impersonal communiqués. The following breakdowns apply to the 397 sources who were people.

Analyzed by occupation, most of the agricultural sources were government employees or experts/professionals and just 20 percent of the sources were farmers or other rural workers:

- **Government:** 48 percent  
*Government leaders, government employees (nonleadership level)*
- **Experts/professionals:** 22 percent  
*Businesspersons or financial experts, academic experts, health or social services professionals, U.N. representatives or experts, science or technology professionals*
- **Farmers, other rural workers:** 20 percent  
*Representatives of farmers' organizations (unions, associations, etc.); subsistence farmers; commercial farmers; mining, forestry, fishery or agriculture workers (permanent, casual or seasonal); traders; artisans; laborers*
- **Community leaders:** 6 percent  
*Activists (trade unions, other civil-society organizations), community leaders (traditional chiefs, community heads, other)*
- **Other:** 4 percent  
*Local residents (occupation unspecified), other*

**Table 5.**



Analyzed by role in the story, 78 percent of the sources were spokespersons and experts/commentators, as shown in Table 5. Subjects, eyewitnesses, those speaking from personal experience, and those representing popular opinion, combined, accounted for just 19 percent of the sources.

The study also asked whether government-owned media used more spokespersons and "experts" than private and community media. Indeed, the study found government-owned media made more use of spokespersons and experts than other media, but not *much* more. That is, all media, when seeking out sources, tended toward the criterion of prominence.

Even when sources were news releases, research reports and videos (as opposed to people), they reflected the bias toward prominence because they were issued by governments, U.N. agencies and other organizations generally considered to be "experts" or "professionals."

Finally, agricultural reporting not only averages a *low number of sources* (1.7 per story) but diverges further from accepted journalistic standards by depending on essentially *one type of source* (the government or private-sector "expert"). The media can produce fair and accurate stories only by reporting diverse perspectives. That means seeking out, not just experts or other

prominent sources, but those less empowered as well. African agricultural reporting, the study found, does not cast a sufficiently wide net.

## Missing Voices: Women

“The contribution by women to the agriculture sector is enormous, but nobody tends to take note of that contribution,” said Arayawa Mutemwa, principal economist for trade and entrepreneurship at the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. “There is a cultural bias against women, and this bias is in the media and in reporters. The media [can be used] to build or destroy. It is very important for the media to record women’s roles.”

As noted earlier in this report, women produce 70 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa’s food, constitute 70 to 80 percent of the agricultural workforce, and make up half of the region’s population. Yet women’s access to expression through the media is disproportionately low.

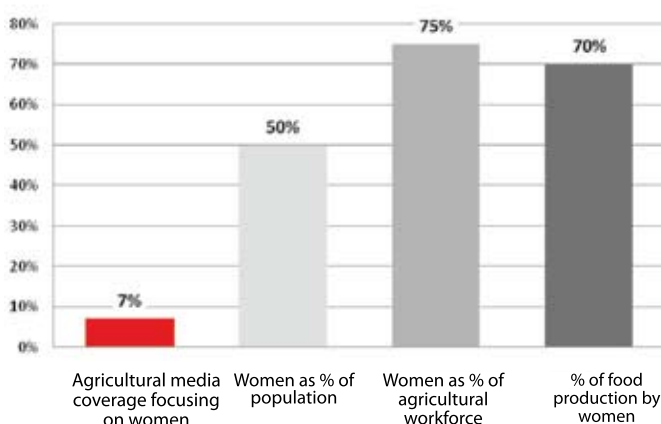
- Respondents to the project’s initial survey in 2007 (see “The Study Structure,” page 11) observed that **there are not enough stories about agriculture in general and specifically as it relates to women.** Many respondents also stressed their wish to see more stories covering women in agriculture.

Among the 260 agriculture stories analyzed in this report—

- **Just 11 percent of the sources were women; 78 percent were men.** Those proportions held true across the three countries studied and their media. (Additional sources included print and video.)
- **Just 22 percent of the reporters were women; 46 percent were men.** Of those, men significantly outnumbered women in print and radio journalism, but women outnumbered men by 10 percent in television. Conclusions are incomplete because the study team could not determine the gender of 23 percent of the reporters, mostly in Zambia. In some cases, bylines were missing; in other cases, the bylines’ phrasing did not reveal gender (for example: “M. Phiri” instead of “Mary Phiri” or “Michael Phiri”).
- **Women were the focus of just 7 percent of the stories.**
- **Only 5 percent of the stories highlighted gender equality/inequality.**
- **Gender-neutral terms hid women’s presence and contributions.** Further analysis of the agricultural stories revealed the consistent use of gender-neutral terms: “farmers,” “peasants,” “cotton farmers” and “dairy farmers,” among others. When gender is not stated, the result is to hide the extent of women’s presence in the farm sector. Gender-neutral terms also can infer gender-neutral realities among farmers. Yet male and female farmers are not treated equally. Because women remain politically, economically and socially unequal in most Sub-Saharan African countries (and worldwide), they face disproportionate obstacles when trying to access agricultural resources – resources all too often reported by the media using gender-neutral, that is, gender-*equal*, terms.

**Table 6.**

Mali, Uganda & Zambia  
THE MEDIA DISCONNECT



Sources: During February and March 2008, the IWMF monitored media coverage (selected print, radio and TV outlets) in three African countries (Mali, Uganda and Zambia). Data were captured for a total of 5,879 stories, of which 260 focused on agriculture. The chart above composites the data for all three countries and for all types of media. Additional sources: total population (The World Bank); agricultural workforce and food production (FAO).

When interviewed for this study, media practitioners admitted that their coverage of agriculture still largely ignores women. They cited gender bias, urban bias and traditional “newsworthiness” criteria as some of the reasons.

Peter Sematimba, president of Super FM in Uganda, and Karin Nsubuga, reporter, presenter and producer with that same station, emphasized that the news criteria have to be strong for agricultural women to gain coverage. “We focus on women in agriculture when it’s important to the nation,” noted Sematimba. The station reports on women in agriculture “when something that creates an impact comes up.” Otherwise, she continued, “we don’t really concentrate on women.” Evans Milimo, deputy managing editor of the *Zambia Daily Mail*, agreed: “Women farmers get more attention as an organized group.”

When women are covered, it is often those “who are closer to the urban centers or educated women,” said Joan Chirwa, a reporter with Zambia’s *The Post* newspaper. Chirwa reports regularly on agriculture as part of her business beat. “In the rural areas, women do more than the men and they get little coverage,” she added.

Mahamadou Coulibaly, the U.N. Development Program’s communication officer in Mali, affirmed the existence of gender bias: “The quantity of coverage does not reflect the real role women are playing in the rural areas, side by side with men. ... [women] are also active in their own associations, carrying out activities that generate income. But the media do not focus enough on this.”

The media should be reporting more about “the linkages between agriculture and economic growth, agriculture and wealth creation, agriculture and income generation at the lower levels.”  
– Mpala Nkonkomalimba, national project manager, Business Development Services, International Labor Organization (Zambia)

## Missing Dimensions: Depth, Breadth, Analysis

News drives the media’s operations worldwide; and in Africa, there is no difference. Using the criteria of timeliness, proximity, prominence and the presence of conflict or disaster (among others), editors and journalists make choices daily to determine what qualifies for coverage. And what usually “qualifies” is breaking news.

Among the 260 agricultural stories analyzed by the IWFMF study, fully 84 percent were “news stories,” only 11 percent fell into the category of “features and news analyses” and the remaining 5 percent spanned all other categories, as shown in Table 7.

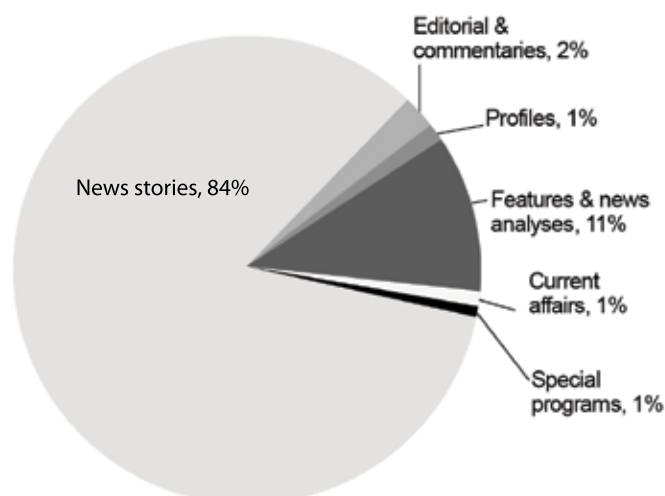
“When there’s money coming into the ministry of agriculture, it becomes newsworthy,” said Monalisa Haunda, a former reporter with Zambia’s National Agricultural Information Services. “And an agricultural incident – whether positive or negative, especially droughts and floods – becomes news.”

Alexis Kalambry, chief editor of the private Malian daily, *Les Echos*, agreed. “Agriculture is news,” he said, “during the harvest and when farmers demonstrate against the bad conditions of access to seed, fertilizer and other inputs and implements.” But regarding agricultural issues in general,

**Table 7.**

### AGRICULTURAL COVERAGE

“News drives the media’s operations worldwide; and in Africa, there is no difference



Source: During February and March 2008, the IWFMF monitored media coverage (selected print, radio and TV outlets) in three African countries (Mali, Uganda and Zambia). Data was captured on a total of 5,879 stories, of which 260 focused on agriculture. The chart, above, composites the data for all three countries and for all types of media.

Kalamby believes “there is no sexy information: no information that can catch the attention of our readers.”

“Most of the journalists visit rural areas only when they accompany official delegates,” noted Mahamadou Coulibaly, UNDP/Mali’s communication officer. “The media seem more interested in events. They come when they are invited for coverage, and they focus on the facts. They are not proactive in the coverage of development issues.”

Even in “news” reporting on agriculture, some events fall by the wayside. “For example,” observed Zambia’s Mpala Nkonkomalimba, “there was an outbreak of disease among the livestock in the Southern province, and not ... [enough] information came out in the media for this to become a national issue.”

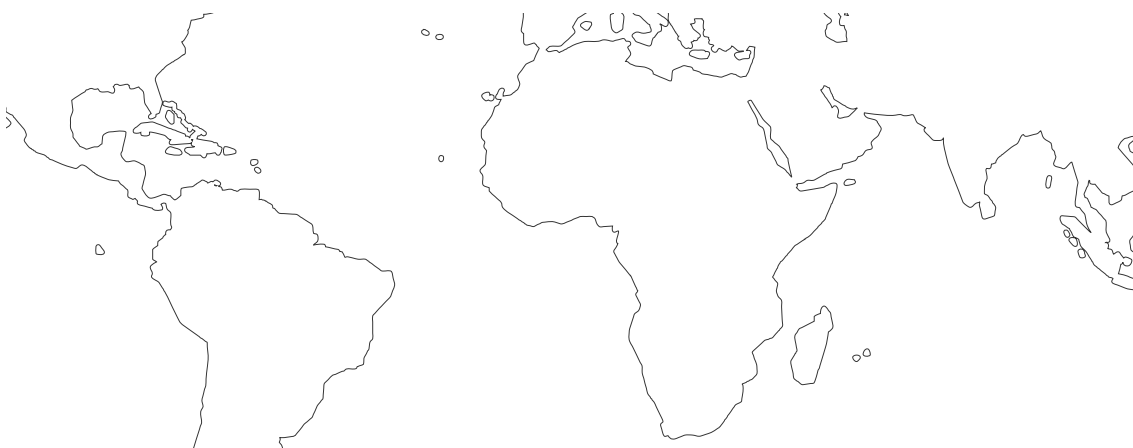
Event-driven news also tends to be defined top-down – almost single-sourced. In many African countries, editors and journalists depend mainly on government-initiated news releases and reports as well as news conferences and other officially sponsored events. With offices mainly in the urban areas, international organizations also provide easily accessible “experts” for the media. In outlying towns and rural areas, editorial calendars revolve around “official” events: for example, hospital and clinic openings; commissioning of new dams, roads and other infrastructure; and introductions of agricultural inputs and machinery. Government representatives are, for reporters, the most easily identifiable sources at such events, so the resulting coverage is dominated by those voices.

Study participants illuminated ways in which the predominance of event-driven coverage can affect the rest of the agricultural coverage, however small.

Nkonkomalimba is the International Labor Organization’s national project manager for business development services in Zambia, organizing training programs and field trips to help journalists report more fully on agriculture. Interviewed by the IWMF researcher, she spoke as both a media consumer and a media trainer. She considers one of the main weaknesses of agricultural reporting to be its inadequate analysis. The media should be reporting more about “the linkages between agriculture and economic growth, agriculture and wealth creation, agriculture and income generation at the lower levels,” she said. Agriculture reporting is driven from a certain perspective, and programs are more for farmers. The media are “not giving a perspective of what the private [commercial] sector would want to know or covering the agricultural issues that are important for lobby[ing] and advocacy, such as the labor issues in agriculture, which should be picked up by the media and addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture,” she added.

The UNDP’s Mahamadou Coulibaly agreed. “Malian media have to do more analyses and inform better,” he said. “They must also write or tell more about the concerns of rural people and give more information about the agricultural potentiality of the country.”

Daouda Diarra, coordinator of the Agriculture High Council in Mali, also pointed to inadequate analysis and stressed the special detriment to the coverage of women. “Women are playing a key role in agriculture. But this fact is not well known because the media do not focus enough on this,” he said. “And when there is information on women’s role in the agricultural sector, the quality does not satisfy me. As a professional in this sector, I would like to have more analysis.”



# IWMF Asks Media Consumers: Where Do You Turn for Agricultural Information?

**"I tend to want to know what is happening in the media, and I work with the media a lot. I work more with the broadcast media and radio stations and rely on these for information on agriculture and rural development. In the Southern Province, I rely on the print media: *The Guardian* newspaper. I rely on the media for information on what is happening across the country, especially information on HIV and AIDS and its impact on the informal agricultural sector. For information on women's roles in agriculture and rural development, I rely on ZARD [Zambia Research and Development], which focuses on gender issues and on gender studies done by the ILO."**

*- Mpala Nkonkomalimba, national project manager, Business Development Services, International Labor Organization (ILO), Zambia*

**"The coverage by the *New Vision*, as well as the NAADS [National Agriculture Advisory Services] newsletter, is very good. But coverage is minimal and coverage of women in agriculture is simply not there."**

*- George Otim, assistant commissioner, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Uganda*

**"There are a lot of agricultural services that have Web sites or electronic bulletins, and I use them for getting information. I do not get this information from the media."**

*- Mahamadou Coulibaly, communication officer, United Nations Development Program, Mali*

**"If there is anything that is aired on agriculture, it is through the radio and not the print media."**

*- Arayawa Mutemwa, principal economist for trade and entrepreneurship, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Zambia*

**"I read information from magazines, like the one produced by the farmers' unions; and I've developed a link with organizations like the Agriculture Support Organization and with the Ministry of Agriculture to get the latest information on research. I use the same sources to get information on women farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture has a program for women farmers' clubs. There is not much information on the Internet or from the media."**

*- John Lengwe, lecturer in agriculture at the Zambia Institute of Mass Communications*

**"I use the media as reference material, but I also use government documents, ministry of agriculture policy and strategy documents, statisticians, newsletters (including the NAADS [National Agricultural Advisory Services] newsletter). They are factual and reliable sources, and there is easy access to them."**

*- Maggie Mabweijano Kyomukama, assistant commissioner, Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, Uganda*

**"I do not depend on the media. We have decentralized offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, and this is where we get information from, including sometimes interesting articles or programs on women associations' activities."**

*- Daouda Diarra, coordinator of the Agriculture High Council, Mali*

# The Challenges:

## Budgets, Biases, Newsroom Pressures

IWMF study participants in Mali, Uganda and Zambia identified many challenges to consistent, in-depth agricultural reporting. Underlying factors include the following:

- Urban bias (see “Missing Voices: Farmers,” page 15)
- Gender bias (see “Missing Voices: Women,” page 15)
- News bias (see “Missing Dimensions: Depth, Breadth, Analysis,” page 17)
- Lack of policy commitments to agricultural reporting, including reporting on women in the agricultural sector
- Money shortage

“Knowledge is a challenge. There is the need to research a lot to write reports that are educative. Each season has its own problems. Reporters go into the field not knowing a subject.”  
– Monalisa Haunda, reporter, Livestock Development Trust (Zambia)

A key constraint to improved African media coverage of agriculture is the fragile financial health of the news organizations themselves. Generally, media owners in Sub-Saharan Africa have insufficient access to capital, inadequate systems for financial management, and overall, an unstable business environment in which to operate (“African Framework for the Development of a Sustainable and Pluralistic Media,” U.N. Economic Commission for Africa, 2007). For example, Mali’s media, despite their large number, for the most part “live from hand to mouth as businesses,” according to the International Research & Exchanges Board’s 2006–2007 report on Mali. Africa’s smaller media, such as privately owned and community-run radio stations, provide essential information to local people. Yet they depend on donor support, earning little, if any, revenue from ads. Their managers generally lack financial skills. As a result, that vital media subsector faces chronic insolvency notes the “African Framework” report.

Even in this financially strained context, study participants felt media houses could make stronger *policy* commitments to agricultural coverage: top-level commitments that would translate into budgets for agricultural training, rural travel, specialist desks and regular agriculturally focused content.

From those underlying factors, at least four principal challenges arise, as discussed below.

**“We have no resident skills”:** Media managers cited insufficient knowledge of the issues, or lack of in-house expertise, as a major challenge. “You need skills. For example, [you need] a basic understanding of agriculture to cover it,” said Evans Milimo, deputy managing editor of the *Zambia Daily Mail*. Currently, he explained, “we have no resident skills, so this is why we contract the content to NAIS [National Agricultural Information Services, a government agency].”

Milimo noted that the lack of “resident skills” applies not only to agriculture but also to other key issues. “We have a young team; therefore, we have to outsource for coverage like agriculture and other stories that require analysis,” Milimo said. Young teams predominate because in Zambia, according to the BBC World Service Trust’s 2006 African Media Development Initiative (AMDI) report, “journalists are paid less than most other workers in the civil service bracket. This has resulted in the most talented of them leaving.”

Uganda, reports the AMDI, has fewer than 1,000 practicing journalists, despite their being relatively well paid compared to other occupations such as teaching. Uganda’s newsrooms are left with few hands

and feet to tackle the many issues on the news agenda; and thus strapped, managers prioritize general rather than specialist reporters. Carolyn Nakazibwe, part-owner and editor of *The Weekly Observer* in Uganda, noted that getting the agriculture story is not easy, because “there is no specialist reporter and [general] reporters need to be briefed a lot.”

And even for experienced agricultural reporters, the subject matter requires constant learning. “Knowledge is a challenge,” said Monalisa Haunda, a former NAIS reporter who is now with the Livestock Development Trust, also in Zambia. “There is the need to research a lot to write reports that are educative. Each season has its own problems. Reporters go into the field not knowing a subject,” Haunda added.

**Training opportunities are scarce:** While media houses interested in agricultural coverage may want knowledgeable journalists, where to get that knowledge was identified as another hurdle.

“Training is an important issue in Mali,” said Siaka Traore, chief editor and news editor of Mali’s Radio Kayira. “There are few journalists who have been trained in a school of journalism.” Mali has no formal journalism school. Instead, the Press House, a federative media association, offers advanced training programs to media professionals. Specialized agricultural training is all but unavailable in Mali.

Uganda has six major journalist-training institutes, housed within universities. In addition, short courses on agricultural reporting are offered by nongovernmental organizations, but those courses are limited, and the NGOs tend not to be media specialists.

Of the several journalism and media-training institutions in Zambia, only the Zambia Institute of Mass Communications includes agricultural journalism as a core part of its entry-level degree program. The media studies department at Evelyn Hone College addresses agriculture as one of several topic areas in a course on specialized coverage. Zambian journalists in some newsrooms are introduced to the issues through in-service training by agencies such as the International Labor Organization.

“There are no specialized desks to use the skills. Instead, the journalists with special knowledge become general reporters once they enter the newsrooms.”  
– Douglas Hampande, media studies lecturer, Evelyn Hone College (Zambia)

**Few agricultural desks, irregular farm coverage:** “There are no specialized desks to use the skills. Instead, the journalists with special knowledge become general reporters once they enter the newsrooms,” said Douglas Hampande, a media studies lecturer at Zambia’s Evelyn Hone College. Special knowledge is applied only where newsroom managers “plan deliberately to have specialized coverage in addition to the general coverage,” Hampande continued.

Newsroom commitments depend in part on overall budgets and, as noted earlier, budgets are tight. They usually depend on ads and ads depend on audience appeal, which many managers believe, agricultural programming lacks.

Joan Chirwa of the Lusaka, Zambia-based newspaper, *The Post*, said there was an overwhelming response from the public to “The Farmers Post,” a supplement that “caters for all levels of agricultural groups, from the smallest farmer to the commercial farmer.” But other study participants had different experiences. Karin Nsubuga, a presenter, reporter and producer for Super FM in Uganda, said, “The listeners sometimes do not really care about agricultural materials.” Echoed Joseph Salasini, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation’s (ZNBC) director general: “Are the people listening or watching the programs? How do I get youth between 16 and 23 years to listen to ‘Lima Time’ [a weekly TV show] or an agricultural documentary?”

Despite those rhetorical questions, Salasini believes that government broadcasters such as ZNBC, unlike private, commercial broadcasters, have a mandate to cover agriculture. However, “costs affect the staffing levels,” he said. The money to find or develop in-house agricultural expertise affects what even government media can do.

**“It is difficult to get to the sources”:** Cecilia Violet Makota, the Zambian farmer profiled at the front of this report, urged reporters “to physically go to the rural areas to get the real stories.”

“It is costly to send journalists to the rural areas, and we cannot afford having a journalist away in the field for a long time,” said Jacques Dez, director of Radio Klédu in Mali. “The staff is small, and we have a lot to cover in Bamako.”

ZNBC’s Joseph Salasini agreed: “It is difficult to cover the farmer who is out of Lusaka because of

proximity and meeting deadlines. There are not enough [rural] centers to produce stories for ZNBC, so reporters need to travel to the remote provinces to cover the areas.” Financial constraints, he added, usually prohibit travel.

“It is costly to send journalists to the rural areas, and we cannot afford having a journalist away in the field for a long time.”

– Jacques Dez, director, Radio Klédu (Mali)

*The Post’s* Joan Chirwa also acknowledged that “it is difficult to get to the sources” and stressed that agriculture cannot be well reported from the capital. “It is monotonous to repeatedly quote the [cabinet] minister

and other people who do not know what is taking place on the ground,” she said. “We need to go to the farming community and speak to the farmers.”



# The Next Steps:

## If You Don't Train, You'll Get Left Behind

Almost all of the challenges presented in this report – the news, gender and urban biases and insufficient policy commitments to agricultural reporting – can be alleviated by proper media training, as shown by the IWMMF's 2004–2006 *Maisha Yetu* project. (*Maisha Yetu*, or “Our Lives” in Swahili, trained journalists to enhance the quality and quantity of reporting on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in three African countries.)

One of the challenges (money shortage: see page 20) is not addressed by the IWMMF training because African media sustainability already is the focus of a number of major initiatives by in-country and international groups. More information about those initiatives appears in the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa's report, “African Framework for the Development of a Sustainable and Pluralistic Media,” which presents action plans and other recommendations to address the issue. In one respect, however, IWMMF training does support media sustainability: as managers and editors develop lasting commitments to agricultural coverage, as journalists become better trained, and as print and broadcast outlets incorporate proven strategies for positive change, Africa's media will become stronger and, thus strengthened and self-sustaining.

To conduct effective training – helping to elevate on the news agenda both agricultural issues generally and issues pertaining to women's roles in rural development – the IWMMF is implementing the following “next steps.” These steps derive from the findings in this report, including input from the study participants, and from the IWMMF's own media-training experts.

1. Secure editorial buy-in
2. Conduct newsroom-based training
3. Strive to equalize participation by women journalists
4. Build diversified partnerships
5. Institutionalize monitoring and evaluation

**Secure editorial buy-in:** Study participants emphasized that, without high-level policy commitments, media houses would not produce (or would be unable to sustain) good-quality, in-depth and frequent agricultural coverage. Buy-in by senior managers and editors is, therefore, an essential first step that paves the way for subsequent actions, such as specialist training, and generally fostering an “agriculture-friendly” journalistic environment.

Senior management and editorial buy-in is an essential first step that paves the way for subsequent actions, such as specialist training, and generally fostering an “agriculture-friendly” journalistic environment.

To lay the groundwork for editorial buy-in, study participants recommended convening forums to share the IWMMF findings with media owners, editors, reporters and trainers. These forums also facilitate much-needed linkage among media “actors.” Finally, the forums enable all stakeholders, *together*, to agree on objectives and to develop action plans aimed at improved agricultural reporting. The first forum took place on February 23, 2009.

Down the road, editorial buy-in will be key to reducing other agricultural reporting challenges, from the bias toward event-driven coverage to

urban and gender biases. None of those biases will disappear overnight. But as owners and editors broaden the dialogue, define the obstacles, review “best practices” and implement their own policies to reduce bias, as they engage in the process, change inevitably will follow.

Change did follow when Zambia's *The Post* newspaper made a management-level commitment to agriculture. During 2007, the paper launched a quarterly supplement compiled by the business desk, "The Farmers Post," whose length was determined by revenue from ads. Evaluated by length alone, the first four issues (at 24, 32, 48 and 32 pages, respectively) showed growing demand. Originally, said reporter Joan Chirwa, management committed to the supplement, not necessarily for profit, but because "agriculture is one of the economic drivers" of the Zambian economy. Management continued the supplement because it proved to be good business as well as good journalism.

**Conduct newsroom-based training:** One study participant, a media studies lecturer at Zambia's Evelyn Hone College, pointed out a gap between the editor and the reporter. He noted, "Once new journalists enter the newsrooms, they find resistance from editors. The target of any in-service training on agriculture or other areas should be the editor, or both the editors and reporters should be brought together in training. The reporters are not the decision makers. Therefore, their advice is not listened to." The U.N. report, "African Framework for the Development of a Sustainable and Pluralistic Media," made the same point.

Thus, another step resulting from this study is newsroom-based training and, in particular, training that follows the model (*Maisha Yetu*) developed by the IWWMF. Now commended throughout Africa, that model ensures that what is taught is sustained, in part, by ensuring that what is taught is a fit (i.e., that it meshes well with the media outlet's unique culture and practical realities). The training involves all stakeholders in varying ways. In December 2008, an online toolkit was developed as a step-by-step guide aimed at news and training editors who would like to improve the quality of health journalism in their newsrooms. (To access *A Step-by-Step Online Training Guide for Better Health Reporting*, visit the IWWMF's Web site: [www.iwwmf.org/docs/IWWMF\\_Tool.pdf](http://www.iwwmf.org/docs/IWWMF_Tool.pdf).)

"If you don't train, you'll get left behind," said Peter Sematimba, president of Super FM radio in Uganda. Across the board, newsroom-based training strengthens the media. Editors, reporters and other newsroom workers gain needed skills. Further, there is a trickle-up effect that strengthens the management's overarching commitment to staff investment and improved policies as well as to the agricultural mandate at hand.

**Strive to equalize participation by women journalists:** Elevating the status of women journalists in their newsrooms through their participation in the project is one step in elevating gender issues. The IWWMF's project first educates all journalists about women in agriculture and, second, helps empower women in the newsroom by (a) calling for 50 percent of training participants to be women; (b) providing special leadership training for women; and (c) emphasizing the coverage of gender issues.

**Build more diversified partnerships:** The success of the actions outlined here depends in good measure on partnerships. Those partnerships may be between senior media managers and media trainers. Journalists and editors need, as partners, potential sources outside the government sector. Of special partnership value are representatives of local and international agricultural NGOs. Those people can identify rural stories that urban editors and journalists never see. They can facilitate trips to the rural areas and meetings with the affected people, enabling journalists to begin covering farming from the farmers' perspectives.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** Key to supporting improved, self-sustaining agricultural media coverage is ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Goals should be set. The IWWMF training, or any media training, is proceeding in delineated stages. Each stage has its own objectives and, at appropriate intervals, will be evaluated by all the stakeholders. The evaluation is covering both the mechanics of the training (for example, how many workshops were held?) and the results so far (did the quantity and quality of agricultural coverage change and, if so, how?).

As media managers themselves become adept at monitoring and evaluation, they gain tools to meet ever-broadening goals for agricultural coverage, including sustainability. Those same tools also tend to help with all facets of management, from finances to policymaking to the myriad issues that arise as the media daily "keep the gates" of the news.

# The Path Forward:

## Giving Voice to the Voiceless

“For journalists committed to social uplift,” wrote G. Pascal Zachary in the International Food Policy Research Institute Forum (March 2007), “the path is clear: dedicate themselves to giving voice to the voiceless, decoding the self-serving statements of the powerful, and encouraging their societies to recognize, however fitfully, that inequitable growth and persistent poverty ultimately threatens all of us.” A journalist specializing in African affairs, Zachary has reported from more than 40 countries and teaches at Stanford University.

That connection between media and “social uplift” was more formally affirmed by some 1,000 delegates to the U.N. Economic Commission for Africa’s Fourth African Development Forum (2004), as noted in their consensus statement: “Only a healthy media sector can fulfill its obligations. If media publishers and broadcasters in both the public and private sectors lack financial resources and security, if they do not uphold professional standards, and if they use reporters and editors who are inadequately trained or experienced, they will fail to live up [to] the standards that underpin public confidence.”

The findings and recommendations presented in this report seek to address factors still hindering the development of a “healthy media sector” as it pertains to coverage of agriculture and of women in the agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The *Sowing the Seeds* study represents the first phase of a four-year IWMF project, *Reporting on Women and Agriculture: Africa*, supported by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

In 2009, the IWMF and its Africa-based partners began to pilot media-training modules at six news organizations: two per country in Mali, Uganda and Zambia. The training is based on the current study’s findings as well as the design of the earlier IWMF project, *Maisha Yetu* (“Our Lives” in Swahili). Piloted from 2004 to 2006, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Maisha Yetu* aimed to enhance the coverage of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria by six news media organizations in Botswana, Kenya and Senegal. The project’s key features were: (1) buy-in, including commitment of institutional support, from top management; (2) continuous on-site training, from editors on down and cutting across all departments; (3) empowerment of women journalists and coverage of women’s issues; and (4) training provided by local African journalists with topical expertise. (For more information about the *Maisha Yetu* project, visit the IWMF’s Web site: [www.iwmf.org](http://www.iwmf.org).)

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# About the

## International Women's Media Foundation

Founded in 1990, the International Women's Media Foundation is a vibrant global network dedicated to strengthening the role of women in the news media worldwide as a means to further freedom of the press. The IWMF uses four strategies in its work:

### Building a Vibrant Network

A network of women in the news media is at the core of the IWMF's work. The IWMF network enables women in the news media to join together in new ways to share ideas, resources, strategies and career advice.

### Cultivating Effective Leaders

By offering innovative training to women in the news media, the IWMF provides them with the skills they need to succeed in their careers and become leaders in their newsrooms.

### Pioneering Change

The IWMF has a track record of developing innovative training that engages journalists in reporting on global issues that improve lives and creating opportunities for women in the news media to grow and expand their careers.

### Honoring Courage

The IWMF advocates for women journalists worldwide and calls attention to their bravery. Each year, the IWMF highlights the courage required to report the news in many parts of the world with the *Courage in Journalism* and *Lifetime Achievement Awards*.



“For journalists committed to social uplift, the path is clear: dedicate themselves to giving voice to the voiceless, decoding the self-serving statements of the powerful, and encouraging their societies to recognise, however fitfully, that inequitable growth and persistent poverty ultimately threatens all of us.”

*– G. Pascal Zachary, journalist, author and teacher, from “Media and Development,”  
International Food Policy Research Forum (March 2007)*



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