

The Munyonyo Declaration: Improving Health Communication and Public Understanding

We, the stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, and knowledge intermediaries, including journalists, broadcasters, librarians, journal editors, and others) concerned with the diffusion of health information in Uganda, gathered at Munyonyo, Kampala, from 26 to 28 April 2017, on the occasion of the first in a series of Building Bridges forums, declare that:

Whereas:

- Health information is a vital but often neglected resource in ensuring, maintaining and securing the health of all people;
- The best available health information should be disseminated and utilized in the country: be of the highest quality, accuracy, relevance, timeliness and applicability, and respect local cultural norms;
- The chain of health communication involves many stakeholders – including researchers, policymakers, and knowledge intermediaries;
- Health information should be checked for veracity and expressed in ways that are appropriate for the conditions and cultures of the recipients. This also applies to health information from open or external sources such as the internet;
- Routine health information should be available on a regular, ongoing basis so that all people are aware of and can apply best health practices;
- Health information must also be designed specifically for emergency preparedness and response for natural and man-made disasters, humanitarian crises, and disaster risk reduction;

And noting that:

- The sources and avenues of dissemination of health information are scattered among many stakeholders in the communications chain;
- Stakeholders often have a poor appreciation of each other's' roles and capabilities, and there are gaps in mutual communications;
- The ability to communicate complex research and technical information in the appropriate language requires a wide variety of skills, and these are not shared evenly among the stakeholders;
- Policymakers have limited access to well-packaged policy briefs based on scientific evidence;
- Researchers are not easily identifiable and accessible to journalists and policymakers;
- Online access to robust evidence-based information is still limited and is scattered across the academic literature and on organizational websites, without any assured means for identifying quality;
- There are limited resources for collating the results of evidence-based information and research;
- The deadline-based nature of much public health communications (particularly among journalists and broadcasters) requires timely feedback and information support;

It is hereby resolved that:

We will build national capacity to disseminate quality, evidence-based and timely health information by establishing a health communication network comprising researchers, policy makers, and knowledge intermediaries, such as journalists, broadcasters, librarians, and journal editors. Our immediate objectives will be:

- To develop a permanent forum and a workshop series in addition to an online network and community of interest comprising researchers and policymakers, as well as journalists, librarians and other knowledge intermediaries engaged in health communication;
- To find support for the network in both resources and information from partners within the country, regionally and internationally, and to engage with kindred activities and partners in neighbouring countries, regionally and internationally.
- To reduce communication barriers and increase understanding between researchers, policymakers, and knowledge intermediaries;

- To create lines of communication that will persist during humanitarian crises and facilitate effective information sharing to support emergency awareness and preparedness, and disaster risk reduction;
- To promote, and lobby for improved access to the best health information, and for more resilient health information channels (including the concept of “Building Bridges”) among health communicators;
- To promote professional standards, continuous engagement, education, on-the-job training and self-evaluation;
- To develop health literacy throughout the health communications chain, and promote the understanding of health information as an important subject in its own right.

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