

MOTO

A NEW PATH FOR JOURNALISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

BBC MEDIA ACTION

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MOTO a new path for journalism in Southern Africa

Women being assaulted buying vital foodstuffs, retired workers who made years of pension contributions not receiving their money, children with learning difficulties as a result of industrial contamination – these are a few of the challenges of everyday life in Zambia tackled by local journalists taking part in BBC Media Action and Free Press Initiative's MOTO programme. The MOTO initiative ('Moto' means 'fire' in Nyanja, one of Zambia's local languages) supports women journalists to develop skills in public interest journalism and to pursue original stories, including investigative journalism. Drawn from radio and TV outlets across Zambia, participants get expert guidance in fact-checking and number-crunching and learn from practitioners experienced in investigative techniques such as secret recording, informed consent and anonymity, as well as how to ensure personal safety while reporting. Moto helps participants achieve greater impact in a media environment constrained by Zambia's economic difficulties.

This review of the journalistic content produced shows a choice of subjects and voices that reflects the shared commitment to the principles of public interest journalism. The emphasis is very much on issues vital to the lives of ordinary people, giving a voice to the poor and the under-represented, and exposing corruption and abuses of power.

This review sampled video and audio reports compiled by seven Moto participants. They operate in media environment which has improved for journalists since the election of Hakainde Hichilema as president in 2021, but an Access to Information Law has not yet come into force and journalists are still not entitled to request and receive information with full transparency.

Strengthening public interest journalism



There is a wide range of private TV and radio stations as well as newspapers and online news outlets, yet the lack of financial resources makes journalists vulnerable, but also lacking means and resources to engage with stories independently and with the required depth. A quick scan of the media content suggests a strong need for independent, public interest journalism. For example, in the report by **Angela Mtambo** on flooding around Lake Tanganyika the experiences and voices of people deprived of their homes and livelihoods come through loud and clear along with their anger at the lack of help and the failure of officials to establish a warning system. By contrast, a quick search on how the story was covered shows it featuring only the voices of ministers promising action, with no mention of the trauma and hardship inflicted by the floods.

Similarly, the devastating impact of industrial pollution, especially from the mining industry, is a recurrent theme in Zambian life and an issue taken up by a number of Moto participants. The reports by **Mercy Mulenga** and **Ennety Munshya** are graphic accounts of the impact on local communities told principally by those directly affected compared to wide-reaching media which reports on high levels of contamination of farmland solely through official statements.

Stories of climate, governance and the most vulnerable

Many of the strongest stories emerging from MOTO participants focus on issues of governance, environmental degradation and the lived experience of those most affected by systemic failures.

An audio report by **Ennie Kishiki** presents a comprehensive account of *the way tree cutting to make charcoal is damaging the natural environment and accelerating climate change*, with multiple voices, atmospheric sound effects and in-depth exploration of the issue. We hear from those directly involved about the importance of charcoal as a major energy provider and source of livelihood, as well as those concerned about deforestation, carbon pollution and the loss of biodiversity. The reporter is at pains to include different and competing viewpoints, and to weigh up the arguments in building towards a balanced conclusion.

A filmed report by **Virginia Chilongo** illustrates *the business of charcoal production* and hears directly from those involved. The storytelling works well to describe both the industry and the *impact on the local environment, drying up the Chongwe River* and helping to fuel climate change. Some technical hitches, including wind noise and jump cuts, detract from interviews – an area that could also be improved with proper equipment provided to journalists and further editing training.

Another video report by **Mercy Mulenga** shows *devastation to crops and contamination of water supply caused by an acid leak from a dam*, forcing a nearby community to leave their homes. A piece to camera adds immediacy and authenticity, with interviews from local people affected by the spill. The impact on health and livelihoods is explored, though those responsible for the contamination receive less scrutiny – an area where Moto could focus for greater accountability.

In a powerful story about *climate-related displacement*, **Angela Mtambo** documents the flooding of homes on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Interviews with local people convey the trauma and loss caused by the floods and highlight frustration at the lack of official response - although a statement was later provided by the Ministry of Water Development. Problems with sound recording and editing made some interviewees hard to follow, which again can be addressed with better technical support.



Building impact and confidence through journalism

The MOTO participants themselves speak of the way the training has changed their reporting. **Mercy Mulenga** works for Yar FM Radio in Kitwe, Copperbelt Province:

“My journey on the Moto project has been very practical, engaging and career changing. I'm now able to report on pieces that are investigative in nature with the impartiality they deserve.”

Angela Mtambo was based in a rural community in Zambia's Northern Province, working for Radio Luswepo, when she joined Moto:

“I'm very confident now that I can do interviews with the authorities and have the confidence to go in the field and meet people facing different challenges.”

Armed with her new skills and confidence, Angela decided to take up the case of retired council workers in her community who had not received pension payments owed them by the local government. Some had worked at the council for more than 20 years, paying into a pension scheme, only to be left in poverty after failing to receive their money when they retired. After Angela aired her story, there was a meeting between the council and the administrators of the pension scheme. The money was paid to the retired workers six months later.



Womba Kasela also sharpened her skills as an investigative journalist through the Moto project. She investigated the re-opening of a coal mine with a record of fatalities. She spoke to injured workers, civic leaders, and mine owners. Her story secured a promise of additional safety measures, which the government later verified had been implemented.

MOTO in Zambia has galvanised grassroots journalism among participants, raising awareness and understanding of what's involved in responsible and effective public interest reporting. It has raised the skill levels of participants,

inspiring and equipping them to produce relevant and engaging content that is accurate and impartial and that has a real social impact.

Not all the content sampled in this review is of equal quality, and there is quite a large gap between the best and some of the rest. However, participants were chosen from partner radio stations with the specific aim of building

the capacity of women journalists to enable them to produce in-depth public interest news reports for broadcast on their radio stations, ensuring they reach the intended audience. Such content is still novel in Zambian media but Moto means it is starting to find a home in radio stations in even the remotest parts of the country.

“The way I pitch stories is totally different,” she says. “There is not so much investigative journalism in Zambia because of a lot of barriers, especially accessing certain information.”

The way forward for MOTO

Much of the content would have been improved by better production techniques in sound and video recording and editing. With future support extending to the provision of better equipment, production grants, and a little more editorial support, future content will continue improving in quality and standards. The content review also suggests that adding consideration of solutions-focused journalism would contribute positively to future content. There is an impressive record of the MOTO participants making a real impact with their reporting, and exploring possible solutions to seemingly intractable problems can also produce improvements to people's lives, even if the outcomes are less immediately obvious or tangible.

MOTO clearly demonstrates its worth as a substantial boost to public interest journalism in Zambia, with the potential for wider regional impact.

The stories delivered by participants on topics such as corruption, mine safety, industrial pollution and climate change have resonance throughout Southern Africa.

This review recommends exploring the possibility of future cross-border productions to extend the reach of such stories to neighbouring countries and the wider region.

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The Moto ('Fire') Initiative is part of the Kudziwa ('To Know'), Funsani ('Ask...'), carried out with the Free Press Initiative and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Some of those trained under this initiative have gone on to win journalism awards and have been selected to work on investigations on the Deepening Democracy Facility supported by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

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