

# RECOUNT



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Bad news makes the news and too often the media runs negative stories about insurance. But does some of the blame lie at the door of the insurance industry for not supporting media through interviews, accessibility and, of course, with marketing? Continental Re, together with *Africa Ahead: the Sustainability Challenge*, asked a group of journalists from across the continent to share their views...

## Is insurance well represented in media coverage?

Pointing out faults and shortcomings is one of the major roles of insurance media across Africa and this should be welcomed by the insurance industry as one way to rid the sector of wrongdoers.

But as Souvik Banerjea, managing director eastern region for Continental Re, explained: “Financial journalists also share a responsibility with the insurance sector to get the word out about insurance and what it can do to support communities, particularly rural African communities.”

The first question for a group of journalists from across the continent, however, was whether insurance is fairly reflected in the media overall. They agreed that much depends on which segment of the media is under discussion.

For example, said Gareth Stokes, a freelance journalist based in South Africa and a judge for Continental Re’s pan-African (re)insurance journalism awards, the trade press will cover insurance as its “stock in trade, making it a lot easier for us to cover aspects of insurance than it is for mainstream media”.

He added: “Definitely at times of stress there are a lot of opportunities to talk about crisis, as witnessed through the pandemic. Unfortunately,



Mwape Zulu Kumwenda

then our editors and publishers are looking for the sensation-seeking angle: What are insurers not doing and what massive proportion of insureds are not going to be covered? Is that state-owned insurer going to collapse under the weight of the claims?”

He stressed that it is really about journalists making sure they tackle these stories correctly, making sure that their facts are right and ensuring that they examine both sides of the coin.

“We can’t always be consumer-focused and take the consumer angle to get more clicks,” he said.

“There is a fair amount of coverage but it centres on the human aspect of things and I guess insurers are there to cover people and the economy, so that is what insurers should expect to be covered in the media.”

Dominic Omondi, a reporter with the Standard Group in Kenya, said: “Of course my perspective is a bit different, writing for a national newspaper. A national paper has a lot of segments from news to business and society. We start broadly with just business or financial news in a national publication like ours. The understanding from financial journalists is that insurance is not well represented.

“In a day you have two or three pages of business news out of 24 pages, which is a fairly small portion of the paper. That is business, so if you narrow it down to insurance, you must remember that you are trying to reach the wider audience for people to relate easily to your news.”

He said that when he arrived at the paper, he tried to “sell” insurance stories to his editors but the message that he kept receiving was that the stories were not relatable and that people would not connect with them as well as they would with banking-sector stories.

“It is not well represented because not a lot of our readers interact with insurance, so it is not easy for them to relate to insurance news. That makes us very different,” said Mr Omondi.

Mwape Zulu Kumwenda, from Prime Television in Zambia, agreed that a lack of awareness about insurance made it hard to run insurance stories and said there was relatively little in the way of insurance coverage in daily news.

“We see a few business reporters telling stories and yet we see a lot of community reporters discussing calamities that would have been eased if the people involved had bought insurance. When trying to speak to different insurance companies to come up with sponsorship packages or an insurance news segment that would compel news outlets to have a specific space to sell insurance stories, most of the insurance institutions have been a bit slow.

“We have a lot of insurance companies in Zambia, some of them are very mobile so it is easy to access insurance, but the industry is slow when it comes to telling stories around insurance,” she said.





# How easy is it to convince your editor to run an insurance story?

Reporting on insurance in Uganda has improved in the last few years, thanks to actions taken by the insurance regulator.

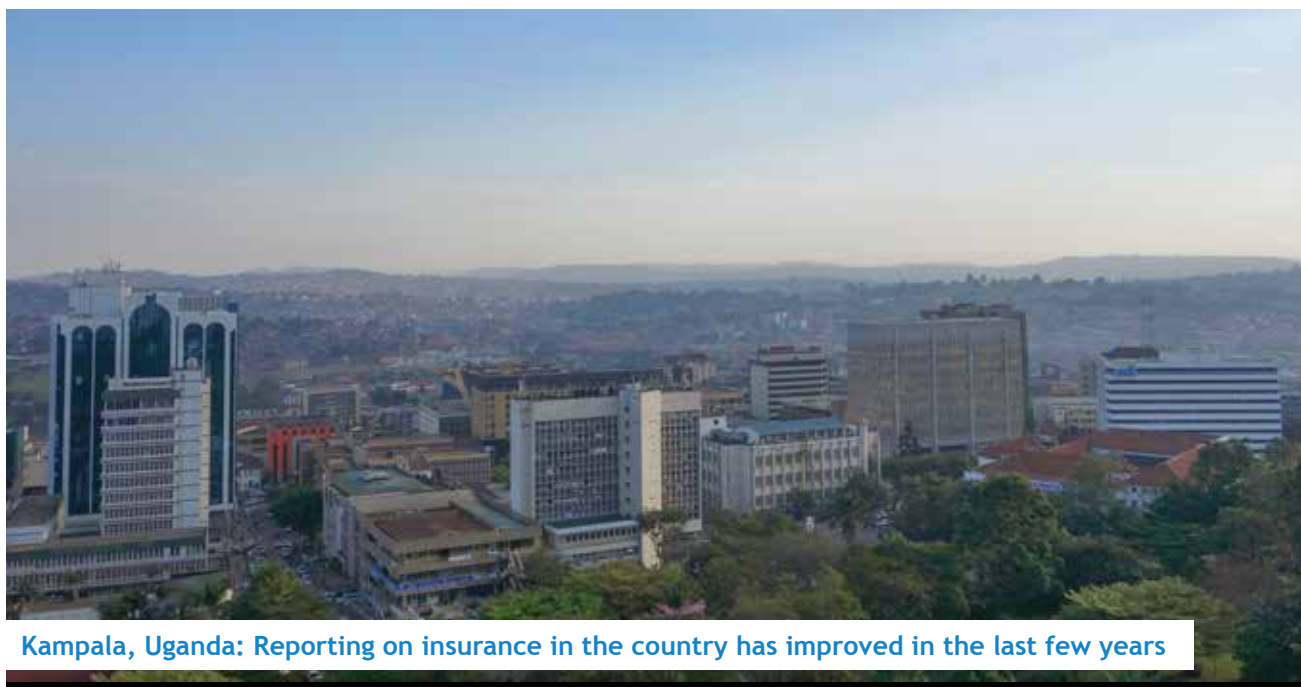
That's the view of Isaac Khisa, from the Independent in Uganda, who said: "Over the last seven or eight years, insurance reporting has really improved. The insurance regulator now talks to a team of journalists and works with them to ensure that the industry is represented in the stories of the day.

"Added to that, they are ready and willing to respond to journalists when they have questions. They will do interviews and also respond with a quote in reaction to a story - usually reacting within an hour."

However, he said insurers themselves can be a bit slower to respond but are improving, with encouragement from the regulator.

That, he added, has translated into more stories appearing in both local newspapers and magazines.

One of the challenges for many of the journalists was the relationship between money spent by advertisers and coverage in the media outlets.



Kampala, Uganda: Reporting on insurance in the country has improved in the last few years

Gareth Stokes said that it is becoming a big problem in South Africa, particularly in the trade publications: "I think it goes to a bigger issue maybe, where traditionally a company used to view media liaison and public relations as two distinct sciences, whereas nowadays I get the feeling that all of the public relations and media liaisons are scrunched into one and very heavily linked to the marketing side of firms.

"That causes a problem because almost every time an insurer liaises with the media, it is with the marketing lens. It is not just the publications saying, 'come and advertise with us and we will give you space', it is also the insurers coming to you with more of a marketing angle than necessarily a news angle or being available to comment on issues."

More recently, he said his attempts to get comments from insurers are being fielded by PR and marketing teams, and then he cannot access the right voice within the insurer.

If someone calls a direct contact, they are being told that the contact is not allowed to comment

unless it is first vetted by PR and marketing. "The PR is running a block between the media and their spokesperson," he warned.

Patrick Alushula, from The Nation group in Kenya, said there is a fairly unique relationship between insurers and the media. However, many of the insurance stories that his paper runs are actually about the financial performance of the insurer - some 60%-70% - and only a few insurers will offer up stories about what they are actually covering with their products.

"When it comes to the product and the need to increase financial protection for people, insurers tend to take a back seat. Also, from the editorial point of view, the editors are looking for financial stories," said Mr Alushula.

He argued that there is a gap that should be filled with insurance stories around coverage. "Mr Khisa talked about teamwork and training. It is a big gap in the Kenyan market and it needs to be addressed," said Mr Alushula. "That way it does not reduce insurance to financial performance alone."



Gareth Stokes

# Do journalists need more training to understand insurance?



Nairobi, Kenya: the country's insurance regulator offers yearly training to reporters

Across Africa, insurance regulators take different approaches towards the media.

Generally, the group agreed it is important that the regulators have ongoing dialogue with the media, not least to ensure that journalists understand the mechanisms of insurance so that any reporting can be unbiased, accurate and realistic.

“We have a very robust regulatory framework in Kenya and once a year we have training where you have the regulator taking the reporters through the insurance world,” said Mr Omondi.

“He runs us through the various insurance products and explains how they work to try and demystify insurance, because one of the biggest problems that we have is a lack of understanding of the whole of insurance, risk and how to underwrite.

“Such sessions are normally done once a year. There is also an ongoing dialogue between the regulator and the news desk, sending through news releases, letting journalists know if there



Dominic Omondi

is a court case involving insurance fraud, for example,” he added.

However, recently that has dropped in frequency, but the regulator has continued to train. Added to that, Mr Omondi said: “you need to train a journalist so that they truly understand what insurance does. If a reporter is constantly being updated, they become better at telling the stories. But what happens in our media houses is that insurance tends to get left to the newcomers. Insurance is a complex area and you need to train.

“It is not just about reporting but also about training. And what we find is that the lot who went for the training in the first year, are not the same as those who go in year two or year three, so the impact is watered down. Journalists need to have a good grasp of what insurance is before they can help the masses understand what insurance can do for them.”





# What can insurers and brokers be doing to encourage better news reporting?

Insurers have a golden opportunity to be proactive in building relationships with the media and encouraging greater reporting of the sector.

Destiny Onyemihia, from The Voice of Nigeria, explained: “We have a lot of insurance journalists in Nigeria. The issue is not about the reporter, it is about getting people to accept insurance and understand how it can help.

“Nigerians are religious and don’t understand why they need insurance when God is on their side. Trying to convince the masses to accept insurance is one of our challenges - both as journalists and as insurers.”

Uganda has one of the lowest insurance penetrations in the region and there are a few journalists who have gone beyond the financial results and the information shared by the regulator, to run more stories about coverage.

But Isaac Khisa believes that some of this starts at home. “Journalists who have worked in the area and understand the benefits of



Destiny Onyemihia



Isaac Khisa

insurance are more likely to be buying cover for themselves.

“This contrasts with other journalists who have not bought insurance and tend to have a fairly negative view,” he said.

“The problem also lies with insurers.”

Mr Stokes added: “Absolutely insurers and brokers can be more proactive. Certainly in the pre-Covid-19 days, the larger global brokers and insurers did get involved in conferences and events. These are always good opportunities for journalists to learn about more far-reaching stories, while having access to experts on the platform.





“I think the important thing is for them to reach out to journalists more when there is a story to tell, to alert journalists to what is going on. A great example was during the business interruption court cases in South Africa, where the big insurers here contacted a lot of journalists and arranged a face-to-face meeting with the chief risk officer, CEO and head of communication to talk about issues.

“That kind of approach is helpful because it gives the journalists that one point of access to the relevant news.”

Mr Onyemihia stressed the need for journalists to have access to data so that they are able to report accurately. He suggested insurers and brokers could be more proactive in sharing that kind of information, which sits behind the financial figures.

Access to data is crucial, agreed Mr Khisa. “The regulator gives us data but insurers will often try to hide data and we find we have to go to the regulator to get the information.”



Patrick Alushula

*“The pandemic has proved to be more of an opportunity than a challenge”*

The pandemic has impacted the relationship between insurers and journalists, the group agreed. Mr Alushula was typical of the group, saying: “We are able to reach more newsmakers than before. Now if you have an established relationship with someone, you are able to access that person without going through the PR company.

“It has proved to be more of an opportunity than a challenge.”

Overall, the group agreed there is a real need to build open relationships to develop greater trust between insurers and the media - something that will benefit both sides, they said.

Recording

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