

**Call for Investigative Story Pitches on Social Accountability**

**Call Number:** 014/2024 (PSA)

The Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) is pleased to invite pitches for investigative stories that explore critical issues in the health and agriculture sectors, particularly in the marginalized communities of Zimbabwe. The focus is on uncovering challenges and successes related to service delivery of attainment of HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as food security. The call is particularly interested in stories from regions such as Binga, Mutoko, and similar areas, where these issues may have unique manifestations and impacts. This initiative aims to shed light on the experiences and solutions emerging from these communities, emphasizing the importance of transparency, community involvement, and effective governance.

Journalists can explore various aspects of social accountability or the lack thereof in Zimbabwe's marginalized areas, particularly in the health and agriculture sectors. Social accountability involves the processes and mechanisms through which citizens hold public officials and service providers accountable for their actions and the quality of services provided. Here are some investigative angles:

**Areas of Focus**

1. **Health Sector**
2. **Transparency in Healthcare Funding and Resource Allocation**

* Investigate how healthcare funds are allocated and spent, zero in on your selected area/s.
* Examine the distribution of medical staff, supplies, equipment, and medications, and any discrepancies or shortages.
* Assess the transparency of budgeting processes and whether local communities are involved.

1. **Accountability in Health Service Delivery**

* Explore the quality of healthcare services provided and any disparities between different regions.
* Investigate cases of corruption, mismanagement, or misuse of resources in healthcare facilities.
* Look into the processes for reporting medical malpractice or negligence and how complaints are handled.

1. **Community Participation and Voice**

* Assess the extent to which local communities are involved in decision-making processes regarding healthcare services.
* Investigate the presence and effectiveness of community health committees or watchdog groups.
* Examine whether marginalized groups, including women and minorities, have a voice in health-related decisions.

1. **Access to Information**

* Investigate whether communities have access to information about their health rights and the services available to them.
* Assess the availability and dissemination of public health information, especially regarding HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.
* Look into the transparency of health data, such as infection rates and health outcomes.

1. **Response to Public Health Crises**

* Examine how effectively local health authorities respond to public health crises, such as disease outbreaks or natural disasters.
* Investigate the level of preparedness and the speed of response in marginalized areas.
* Assess the accountability mechanisms in place for emergency healthcare provision.

1. **Agriculture Sector**
2. **Equitable Distribution of Agricultural Resources**

* Investigate how agricultural resources, such as seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, are distributed among farmers.
* Look into any instances of favoritism or corruption in the allocation of government subsidies or grants.
* Assess the impact of these practices on smallholder farmers and marginalized communities.

1. **Access to Agricultural Extension Services**

* Assess the availability and quality of agricultural extension services, including training and technical assistance.
* Investigate any barriers marginalized farmers face in accessing these services.
* Look into the accountability mechanisms for agricultural extension officers.

1. **Community Engagement and Inclusion**

* Investigate how community members are involved in agricultural planning and policy-making processes.
* Look into the role of farmer organizations, cooperatives, and civil society groups in advocating for farmers' rights and interests.
* Assess whether marginalized groups, such as women and youth, are adequately represented in these forums.

1. **Impact of Government Policies**

* Evaluate the effectiveness of government policies and programs aimed at improving agricultural productivity and food security.
* Investigate the level of accountability in the implementation of these policies, including monitoring and evaluation processes.
* Look into the role of international aid and donor-funded projects in supporting or undermining social accountability in agriculture.

Each successful pitch will be supported with small stipend to cover direct costs that shall be incurred by the newsroom/ journalist/s in the production of the investigative story. The costs are limited to courier services, transportation, communication, lodging among other surface costs. We encourage submissions that offer fresh perspectives, compelling narratives, and are rooted in thorough research.

**Expectations-** Selected journalists are expected to publish:

1. 1 (one)- in-depth investigative story with thorough investigations on health or agriculture with relevance on social accountability.

**Selection Criteria**: Grants will be offered to journalists with the strongest applications. Applications will be judged on the quality of the story pitch, the applicant’s journalism skills as indicated by their work samples, and evidence of support from the applicant’s editor.

Pitches and investigative story ideas that will be supported should positively answer the following:

* Why should readers care about this story?
* Why should we publish this now?
* How does the story build on what is already been covered?
* Is the story likely to get traction or impact?

**Deadline:** Due date for submission of this application is COB Thursday 9 August 2024 at 1000hrs. All applications should be submitted to: [mediacomplaints@gmail.com](about:blank) and copied to [director@vmcz.co.zw](mailto:director@vmcz.co.zw)

**Attachments:** Please submit the completed application form with a signed acknowledgment note from an editor as a guarantee that your story will be published after a successful application process and production.

**APPLICATION FORM**

{NB: DO NOT EDIT OR REMOVE ANY SECTIONS FROM THIS TEMPLATE- you can copy and paste this template to a fresh page to create more space for responses}

**NB. Incomplete applications or applications with missing required supporting documents will not be considered.**

**COMPLETE All SECTIONS**

**Story Focus Area** *(Tick appropriately)*

**(a) Health:**

**(b) Agriculture:**

**(c ) Both (Health & Agriculture):**

**FULL NAME : SEX :**

**Call Number:** 014/2024 (PSA)

**AGE:** *(Tick appropriately; X Below 35years*  *; Y Above 35years*

**MEDIA HOUSE** *(where the story/stories will be published*

**DUTY STATION:** (Indicate City/Town)

**CONTACT DETAILS:** *(email &phone number)*

**TOTAL BUDGET REQUIRED TO CODUCT THE INVESTIGATION (**Amount in USD):

**PROJECT OVERVIEW *(****max 150 words****)***

*Briefly summarize your topic & tell us what makes your approach different or unique. What is the expected traction/impact?*

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**STORY PITCH *(****max 400 words****) (Pitch stories not topics)***

*Story pitches must demonstrate research and answer the following KEY QUESTIONS: WHY is this story important? WHO are my sources? WHAT new ground are you breaking?, what is the magnitude (data/statistics)?*

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**WHEN** *do you expect to start and complete the investigation stories? (Submit investigation timeline using the format below)*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Date** | **Description** | **Means of verification** | **Sources/ Key Persons** |
| *1* | *eg 1 August 2024* | *eg One on One with mentor* | *eg Physical meeting* | *eg Mentor* |
| *2* | *Eg 6-10 August 2024* | *Eg gathering of facts, evidence* | *Eg cabinet minutes, treasury report, ministry or women affairs procurement documents* | *Eg Cabinet secretary, treasurer, ministry procurement secretary* |
| *3* | *Eg 14 August 2024* | *Investigations (what exactly)* |  |  |
| *4* | *Eg 17 August 2024* | *Submission of 1st Draft to the mentor* | *Story Ist Draft* | *Mentor & VMCZ* |
| *5* | *Eg 20 – 23 August 2024* | *Incorporation of input from mentor* |  |  |
| *6* | *Eg 28 August 2024* | *Submission of 2nd Draft to the mentor* | *Story 2nd Draft* |  |
| *7* | *Eg 4 September 2024* | *Submission of Final Draft to the mentor* | *Story Final Draft* |  |
| *8* | *6 September 2024* | *Publishing of approved article* | *Story Link* | *Name of Publication* |

**Methodology: (**Please indicate the specific procedures or techniques to be used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about the selected topic) Max 100 words

**Please list three Links of your previous investigative work to demonstrate your skills.**

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Any questions regarding the call are answered between 1000rs to 1500hrs between 29 July and 2 August 2024, ONLY.