

Conference
on
Indigenising Health Communication
Perspectives from Malawi

Date: 9-5pm on Thursday 3 July 2025

Venue: Capital Hotel, Lilongwe

Introduction

Health communication can include a broad range of information about the prevention of illness, evidence of effective treatment/s, and/or how to access health resources. Such information may be mediated via any number of channels such as print media, television, radio, cinema and the Internet as well as other spaces of representation, participation, decision-making and voice (e.g. within healthcare settings, public campaigns etc.) (Dutta, Kaur-Gill and Metuamate, 2024: 3582). Health communication studies focus on the use of communication strategies employed to mediate such information in order to influence and motivate individuals, institutions, and communities in making effective health decisions (Ahmed & Bates 2016: 3).

In African contexts, public health is and has been practiced within the context of colonial and post-colonial power structures, and has been criticised for its limited emphasis on care, traditional cultural practice or power inequalities. As medical Anthropologist Eugene Richardson (2020: 33) argues, “*the dominant logic for epidemic disease containment [in Africa] (including smallpox, malaria, and influenza) has dictated isolation of sick individuals, with little in the way of patient care*”. As such, a lingering mistrust of Western medical interventions and anticolonial sentiment frequently mixes with conspiracy theories about public health in African contexts (Horner, 2022; Williamson Sinalo, 2022).

Scholarship within the field of health communication has tried to address the colonial legacies of public health. For example, Mohan Dutta’s (2008, 2011, 2018) culture-centered approach (CCA) is a meta-theoretical framework for addressing health inequalities by building communicative infrastructures for listening to the voices of subaltern communities that are hitherto erased from dominant discursive spaces. Theoretically founded on postcolonial and subaltern studies, CCA “concerns itself with the voices of marginalized groups and explores the interaction between culture and structure that creates conditions for marginality” (Dutta, 2011: 8), and opportunities for agency. In Dutta et al.’s words (3584):

a culture-centered critique “unpack[s] the assumptions behind how target audiences of campaigns are selected, how messages are designed and disseminated, and what channels are selected and why... whose voices are involved in creating and designing campaigns and for what purpose. Are communities that are targets of these campaigns engaged in authentic and equitable ways? Do these campaigns reproduce symbolic inequalities without changing the material inequities? How are campaigns complicit in structures of whiteness?”

Aim and Objectives

This conference on *Indigenising Health Communication* aims to facilitate discussions that challenge existing approaches to health communication in Malawi and in Africa more broadly. It welcomes

contributions that consider how health promoting interventions can be designed from a Malawian cultural perspective. Possible themes and topics could include, but are not limited to:

- Incorporating process of community design and participation
- Anti-racism in health communication
- Raced, classed, and gendered erasures in health communication
- Issues of land occupation and inequalities
- Health communication and the environment
- Health communication and food security
- Health communication and social change

Participation

Participation to the conference on *Indigenising Health Communication* is by invitation and submission of abstracts. The conference welcomes diverse perspectives and contributions, fostering a collaborative environment where members of academia, health and communication researchers, and health activists can engage in rigorous discussions. The abstracts to be submitted should be related to health communication that critically engage with the conference theme. Thus, selected abstracts will undergo rigorous discussion and review first before acceptance. By bringing together these stakeholders, the conference aims to facilitate critical explorations of health communication through a Malawian cultural lens, ultimately informing innovative approaches to health-promoting interventions.

If you are interested in participating in the conference, please submit an abstract of your proposed paper (250 words) and a brief bio of your professional background (100 words) by Wednesday 30th April 2025 using the following web link or QR code below.

<https://forms.gle/UG1FHEHDM9DQSp8>



Organizers and Contact Details

The conference is being organised by Dr Caroline Williamson Sinalo, lecturer in World Languages at University College Cork and visiting scholar at the Malawi Institute of Journalism (caroline.williamsonsinalo@ucc.ie), and Murry Siyasiya, lecturer at the Malawi Institute of Journalism (msiyasiya@mijmw.com or +265884135917). The organisers are currently investigating news media narratives of Mpox in Malawi, South Africa, Rwanda and Burundi.