

Para Sport Against Stigma

Research Report on the Tokyo 2020 Broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa

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1.0. Introduction and Executive Summary

Introduction

The AT 2030 Para Sport Against Stigma project aimed to examine how disability stigma can be overcome through Para sport so to increase assistive technology (AT) adoption in Africa. The project centred on a four-pillar approach: education, athlete development, Paralympic broadcast and cross-cutting research activity.

This research report will document the research insights from the **broadcast research pillar**. It will provide an overview of the research conducted, key insights, and an analysis of ‘what works’ in order to enhance the sustainable development, reach and impact of the Paralympic broadcasting across Sub Saharan Africa as a vehicle for disability stigma reduction and AT adoption.

The research insights outlined in this report have been developed through fieldwork activities conducted Malawi in collaboration with colleagues at the Centre of Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi. The fieldwork included:

- Preliminary communicative ecology mapping in Malawi.
- Interviews with staff at TV Media Sport (TVMS) (the International Paralympic Committee’s (IPC) broadcast partner responsible for the production and distribution of the Tokyo paralympic games highlights package) and Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) (National public service state broadcaster in Malawi).
- Translations of Paralympic broadcast TV Package.
- Focus group research with Paralympic audiences across Malawi.

Taken together, the research provided important knowledge on: (a) the successes and challenges in the development and distribution of the Paralympic Tokyo 2020 highlights package; (b) audience experiences of watching the Paralympic highlights package; and (c) the cultural impact of the broadcast on disability stigma reduction and the reduction of barriers to AT adoption.

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Executive Summary

The research insights indicate that there were some technical difficulties related to the distribution of the Tokyo Paralympic Games highlights video packages from TVMS to National broadcasters. These were overcome where possible by National broadcasters but led to some delays in the scheduled broadcasting of the Games across all 49 National Broadcasters. Insights regarding the technical challenges faced by National broadcasters in the distribution of the highlights package need to be considered by the IPC and TVMS with interventions to improve the effectiveness of future distribution.

Focus group audience research conducted in Malawi indicated that TV broadcasting reached a relatively limited audience share. Audience research highlighted the popularity and importance of radio broadcast and community screening activities in community spaces such as Schools. These communication activities were especially important to reach and engage rural communities. The research indicates that Paralympic broadcasting via a single National TV station significantly reduces audiences' engagement, reaching mainly urban and middle-class populations. It is imperative that the IPC and TVMS consider ways to improve the reach of the Paralympic audience through diversifying the ways in which the broadcast is delivered.

Focus group audience research conducted in Malawi further indicates that the impact of the Paralympic broadcast on audiences' disability attitudes was positive. A proportion of the Malawian Paralympic audience suggested Paralympic coverage was a useful tool for tackling negative cultural disability attitudes and showcasing the role of AT in *enabling* individuals with a disability to play sport and participate in civic life. Personal and localised stories of Para athletes and their experience of disability were particularly powerful in capturing the audience and reducing some forms of disability stigma. Paralympic coverage can play an important role in addressing disability stigma and AT use, but content needs to be localised to engage communities in local Para athlete stories of disability. It is imperative to consider the power of disability narratives in the Paralympic coverage and consider how these can be developed to better challenge intersectional forms of disability stigma and AT uptake.

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2.0. Research Activities

The broadcast research was conducted in Malawi in collaboration with colleagues at the Centre of Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi. The methodology was qualitative and involved activities that captured the experiences and views of key stakeholders. Research activities to date have included the following:

- **Preliminary communicative ecology mapping in Malawi.**

Communicative ecology mapping in Malawi was conducted by the project team from 2019. This included several desk-based studies and in country ethnographic fieldwork. Communicative ecology mapping has provided an important contextual backdrop to the research analysis and subsequent implications.

- **Interviews with staff at TV Media Sport (TVMS) (the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) broadcast partner responsible for the production and distribution of the Tokyo paralympic games highlights package) and Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) (National public service state broadcaster in Malawi).**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with TVMS staff in October 2021 and with staff from Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in March 2022. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in preparation for ongoing qualitative data analysis.

- **Translations of Paralympic broadcast TV Package.**

The Development Broadcasting Unit (DBU), a unit of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) led on the project activity called **Grounded Paralympic Media Content – Chichewa Voice Over Paralympic Tv Broadcast Highlights** in the period between 24th August 2021 and 30th September 2021. This included translation and additional commentary of 13 daily Paralympic highlights package from English to the main indigenous language in Malawi – Chichewa.

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- **Community screening of the Paralympics in rural communities across Malawi**

Mobile screenings were organised by researchers at University of Malawi Chancellor College in three districts in Malawi: Chiradzulu (Southern Region); Lilongwe (Central Region); and Mzimba (Northern Region). The screenings were organised in partnership with Chiefs and were held in schools or churches. Because additional context was required to be able to understand the Paralympics highlights, a video of Taonere Banda (Malawian Paralympic athlete), a clip from Phoenix Rising, and then one of the daily highlights episode with Chichewa commentary was shown. This was followed by a discussion about disability in the local community. Interviews were undertaken before and after the screenings, and researchers engaged in observation and fieldnotes. Community screening of the Paralympics in rural communities across Malawi will be expanded on in the community engagement action research report.

- **Focus groups research with Paralympic audiences across Malawi.**

3 focus groups of up to 10 participants were conducted across the 3 main cities in Malawi. Total number of focus groups = 12; total approximate number of participants = 90. The focus groups were evenly spread in terms of demographics: 50% of the focus group participants will identify as female; 25% of the focus group participants will identify as disabled.

Focus groups were conducted in February 2022 and videos of the highlights package were used to stimulate focus group discussions.

3.0. Research Insights

3.1. Paralympic broadcasting: Challenges and successes

TVMS were responsible for editing and distributing daily 52-minute highlight packages of African centered content to 49 National broadcasters across Sub Saharan Africa. The highlights package was provided by TVMS to National broadcasters with English, French and Portuguese commentary and aimed to highlight stories of Para athletes from the region.

National state broadcasters were considered the most suitable outlets for broadcasting the Paralympics highlights package because of public service remits.

The main challenge highlighted by TVMS related to content production and the localisation of the programme for African audiences. The Covid-19 restrictions in place during the Tokyo Paralympic Games reduced the opportunities to capture additional unilateral content to include in the highlights package, such as interviews with African athletes. Although TVMS used contacts at the Olympic Broadcasting Service (OBS) to secure additional African centered content, the circumstances made it difficult to sufficiently localise the highlights package.

From the perspective of MBC, there were issues in accessing the Paralympic highlights package using the link TVMS provided to National broadcasters for downloading the content. The file format used by TVMS to distribute the highlights package could not easily be converted by MBC. Furthermore, the highlights videos distributed by TVMS were often more than the required 54 minutes. Subsequently, the videos had to be edited by MBC to make them suitable for broadcast. These technical issues may have been experienced by other National broadcasters. According to TVMS, there were at least 4 National broadcasters that failed to broadcast the Paralympic highlights package during the Games.

DBU – the development unit of Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) responsible for overseeing translations – did successfully deliver on the production of 14 video Paralympic highlights packages with Chichewa voiceovers despite the technical issues with accessing the highlights videos. The Chichewa interpretations and commentaries were important in localising the content for Malawi audiences and making it more accessible for audiences who do not speak English. Indeed, it is important to note that there are around 12 different languages spoken in Malawi, with Chichewa being the most common, spoken in the home by

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57%.¹ Further, the translations provided additional audio content to the highlights package that tackled local understandings and narratives around disability discrimination, stigma and AT use.

The main challenge faced by both TVMS, and National Broadcasters is financial sustainability. Many National state broadcasters, such as MBC, have limited financial and organisational capacity to secure the TV rights for future Paralympic Games and develop additional localised content that adds cultural value to the programming.

¹ <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/profiles/Malawi/Language>

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3.2. Audience perceptions and engagement

It was estimated by the International Paralympic Committee that the Tokyo broadcast package would reach over 250 million viewers in Africa. However, fieldwork exploring the media ecology and consumption in Malawi has indicated that TV ownership and online/digital media usage is typically restricted to the urban professional middle-class populations. This is reflected in available statistics (MACRA 2015), which shows that 46.3% households in urban areas have a TV, and in a country where 80% of people live in rural areas², only 6.2% of rural households have a TV (with an overall total of 10.9% of Malawian households having a TV). It is therefore likely that the figure of 250 million viewers is predominantly based on an overestimated audience share of urban professional middle-class populations.

The exclusiveness of TV ownership to urban centres was highlighted in the focus groups conducted with Paralympic audiences in Malawi.

“The programme is good because people are able to watch. But my plea and concern is that, most people who have access to televisions are in towns unlike in villages. Hence the coverage of the programme is limited”.

“Broadcasting on TV is a very good thing, but they should not just let this be in urban areas because, for us to move together, there is need for other communities to watch these things. This will help us leave no one behind”.

The responses from the audience focus groups further indicated that there were some issues with the scheduling of the Paralympic highlights package (highlighted in the section above) which meant the Games weren't broadcast at times suitable for attracting larger audience numbers. This may have been a result of the technical difficulties MBC faced in downloading the videos from TVMS.

“They should consider the convenient time for many countries to watch the games. They must choose a good time for example here in Sahara most of the games are broadcasted at night while we are sleeping”.

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.rur.totl.zs>

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“However, the programmes should be aired at suitable and convenient time for everyone to be able to watch”.

Unlike TV, radio broadcast is the most common form of media and consumed by both urban professionals and local communities. Paralympic radio broadcasts may therefore be an effective means to engaging both urban and rural communities in Paralympic narratives.

The use of mobile screenings and community theatre (theatre for development) have been used to engage rural communities in Paralympic broadcast and Paralympic narratives. It was widely acknowledged by the respondents within the focus groups that there needed to be a greater emphasis on community led activities for the Paralympic broadcast to reach, and have impact on, rural communities.

“It should not only be broadcasted on TVs only but go to the markets with the big screens because there are few people with TVs screen. This will encourage people in the village that people with disabilities can do this and they will have a positive mind”

“Airing such programmes is really good, however not everyone will have access to them and those who do may not even have people with disabilities in their families. Hence, it would be great if you could visit schools and make children watch the programme. Or if you could invite parents, explain to them and let them watch the videos for free”.

In summary, Paralympic coverage through broadcasting via national state TV will not reach enough of the population to be sustainable long term and be meaningful vehicle for challenging disability stigma and barriers toward AT adoption. For the Paralympic broadcast to have any impact in Sub-Saharan African countries with a communication/media ecology and infrastructure such as Malawi, a range of media activities will be required to enhance access and extend the reach and impact of the Games. This may include distribution of the Paralympic games through other more accessible platforms (e.g., online streaming and radio broadcast) and the use of community theatre and school-based activities to engage communities in Paralympic stories.

3.3. Disability stigma and barriers toward assistive technology (AT) adoption

In Sub Saharan Africa, disability is predominantly viewed as a negative identity, subject to systematic social, economic, and material exclusion and understood through informal channels of communication. The representation of people with disabilities in formal media, such as TV, radio, film, and print news, is largely regressive and exclusionary. Media content that covers topics of disability provide very limited information on disabled issues and rarely include personal stories of disability that promote family, community and / or peer support. Moreover, labels or derogatory language are often used to describe people with disabilities reinforcing negative portrayals.

The focus groups research conducted with a proportion of audiences in Malawi demonstrated the pervasiveness of disability stigma within communities:

“A person with a disability is the one who needs support to do anything such that s/he cannot do anything without someone supporting him/her”

“Most of the time people think that people with disabilities are useless and cannot assist the family in their time of need”

“In my community people see these people with disabilities as of no benefit and they don’t send these kinds of children to school; instead, they keep them up in the house”

However, many focus groups respondents indicated that their individual perceptions and attitudes toward disability had changed after watching the Paralympic broadcast and felt the broadcast was important to challenging cultural and community stigma toward disability.

“Watching these highlights has helped change the way I think about people with disability that we should not discriminate against them, and they are people just like everyone else”

“The highlights have taught me that disability is not something we need to hide. We can let the relative interact with his friends than keep him/her inside a house”

“I have been moved so much. In the past, when I saw a person with a disability, I would think about how hard it was to be so limited in life but now I know they can do so much more like playing sports on a wheelchair”.

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“In my view, I did not consider them as part of the norm, they were the other in the community. But from watching the programme, I realise they are just like the rest of us”.

Narratives of Para athletes who have overcome physical and structural barriers to succeed in elite sport *and* other areas of civic life (education, employment etc) were effective in engaging and audiences in the broadcast and challenging stigmatising attitudes toward and misconceptions of disability. In some cases, Paralympic narratives began to counteract disability narratives of public shame, embarrassment, and isolation.

“The background story catches the attention of those listening or watching especially those with disabilities and they can relate to those who are participating in the sports and feel motivated and inspired”

“I was interested in the person and their disability. For instance, I saw people with no arms playing a certain sport. This has changed my mentality of feeling pity for them because of their disability, I now see their potential.

Narratives of Para athletes were also important for drawing attention to the role of AT in *dis/abling* people with disabilities to participate in sport and live independently. The focus groups reveal that there is no evidence to suggest stigma around the use of AT. Rather, focus group respondents were cognisant of the challenges they faced in access to AT provision. As such, Paralympic coverage that focuses on the benefits of AT without making sure provisions is available may be disempowering for populations. It is therefore imperative that the representational discourse around AT matches the reality of access and provision.

“The biggest challenge is mobility. The person is not able to walk therefore cannot move to the market. As we have seen those who were playing basketball were using wheelchairs but here the challenge is the lack of assistive devices”

“The video has taught us that if we have relatives in our homes who have disabilities like a relative whose leg was cut, we have learnt that s/he can run if we can provide artificial leg”

“They want wheelchairs for doing athletics, where are they going to get them?”

In summary, Para sport narratives are an effective vehicle for reducing disability stigma and attitudes toward AT adoption. Localised narratives of Para athletes who have overcome physical and structural barriers to succeed in elite sport *and* other areas of civic life (education,

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employment etc) are particularly powerful in challenging culturally specific and stigmatising disability discourses. If used effectively, this narrative template can counteract disability narratives of public shame, embarrassment and isolation. It may also be used to effectively tackle gendered forms of disability stigma by promoting empowering stories of female Para athletes. However, an overemphasis on this narrative at the expense of others can be counterproductive if it promotes the idea that stigma can be overcome through engagement in Para sport alone and without wider social and structural change to support people with disabilities. Further still, Paralympic stories that focus on the benefits of AT may be disempowering for some as communities are aware of the structural and material difficulties in AT access and provision.

Given the limitations in the reach of Paralympic broadcast, Paralympic narratives may be more effective as a mechanism for social change in community theatre and other community led communication activities.

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4.0. Implications: ‘What works’

This report has highlighted the challenges and successes of the Paralympic Tokyo broadcast in Malawi; Malawian audience perception and engagement with the broadcast; and the role the broadcast played in tackling disability stigma and barriers towards AT adoption.

The findings indicate that Paralympic broadcasting is an important vehicle in disability representation and the development of empowering disability narratives. However, Paralympic broadcast through National state TV alone is not sufficient to challenge widespread intersectional forms of disability stigma and discourses around AT use. For the Paralympic broadcast to have reach and impact in Sub-Saharan African countries with a communication/media ecology and infrastructure such as Malawi, and to be sustainable as a social change vehicle, a range of media activities and diverse forms of distribution will be required. This should include broadcast via more accessible platforms such as radio and digital streaming, as well as community screening via community hubs (e.g., in schools).

Localising Paralympic content through Chichewa interpretations and commentary was successful and should be further developed as a localising activity for future Paralympic Games. The Chichewa interpretations and commentaries were important in localising the content for Malawian audiences and making it more accessible for a wider audience share. Further, the translations provided additional audio content to the highlights package that tackled local understandings and narratives around disability discrimination, stigma and AT use. Translated commentary should be considered as part of the future development of the broadcasting. However, the Chichewa commentary did require additional work by MBC and financial provision.

Although state owned National broadcasters, such as MBC, are considered public service broadcasters (PSB) with a remit suitable for Paralympic broadcast, the close political association between the National State broadcasters and the incumbent ruling governments needs to be considered. Indeed, there is wariness among some TV audiences concerning the political affiliations and role of state broadcasters. Furthermore, the funding models of state-owned broadcasters such as MBC give them limited financial capacity to invest in the Paralympic broadcast. For the broadcast to be financially and socially sustainable medium for

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long term cultural change, commercial independent broadcasters with the capacity to invest in the Paralympic highlights package and provide additional programming with may be suitable.

Audience and community research indicate that Paralympic coverage is a useful tool for tackling negative cultural disability attitudes and showcasing the role of AT in *enabling* individuals with a disability to play sport and participate in civic life. The use of personal and localised stories of Para athletes were particularly powerful in capturing audiences and reducing some forms of disability stigma. Narratives of Para athletes were also important for drawing attention to the role of AT in *dis/abling* people with disabilities to participate in sport and live independently. Focus group audience data reveals that communities are aware of challenges in access to AT provision. Thus, Paralympic coverage that focuses on the benefits of AT without making sure provision is available may be disempowering for populations. It is therefore imperative that AT access and provision is improved alongside the development of the Paralympic broadcast.

Summary:

- Paralympic broadcasting is via state owned National broadcasters only is unlikely to be sufficient to challenge widespread intersectional forms of disability stigma and discourses around AT use.
- A range of media activities and diverse forms of distribution will be required for long term sustainability and social change. This should include broadcast via more accessible platforms such as radio and digital streaming, as well as community screening via community hubs (e.g., in schools), and other community led activities.
- Localising Paralympic content through Chichewa interpretations and commentary is key to reaching a larger audience share.
- Paralympic narratives can tackle disability stigma and attitudes towards AT. These need to be developed to tackle intersectional forms for disability stigma and embedded in community based activities.

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