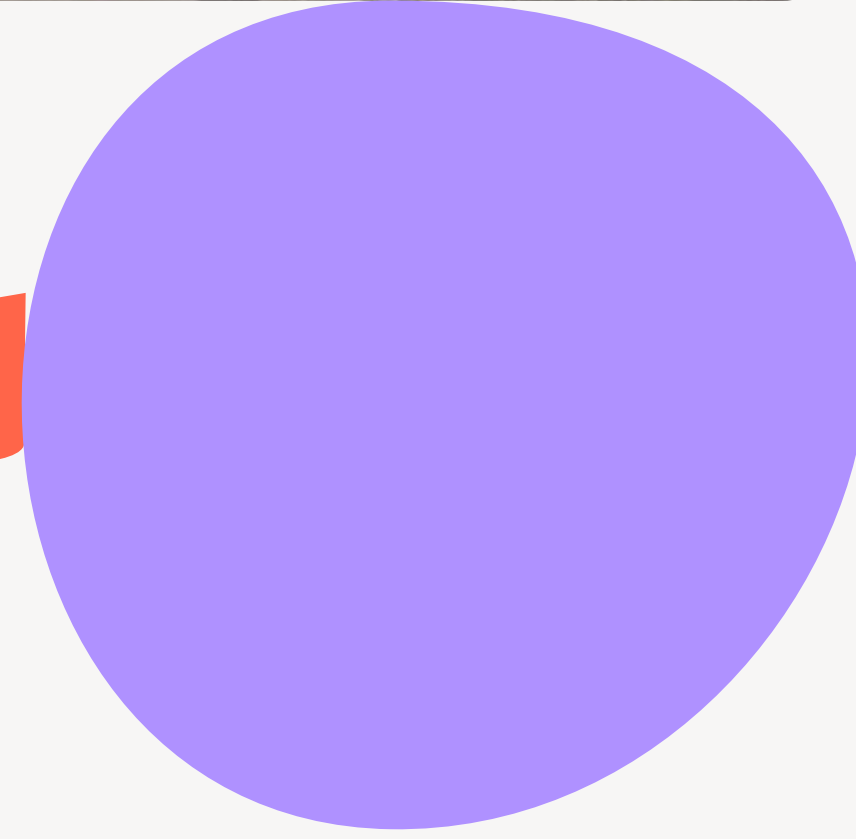


# Mercury Phoenix Trust HIV/AIDS 2023 Reporting



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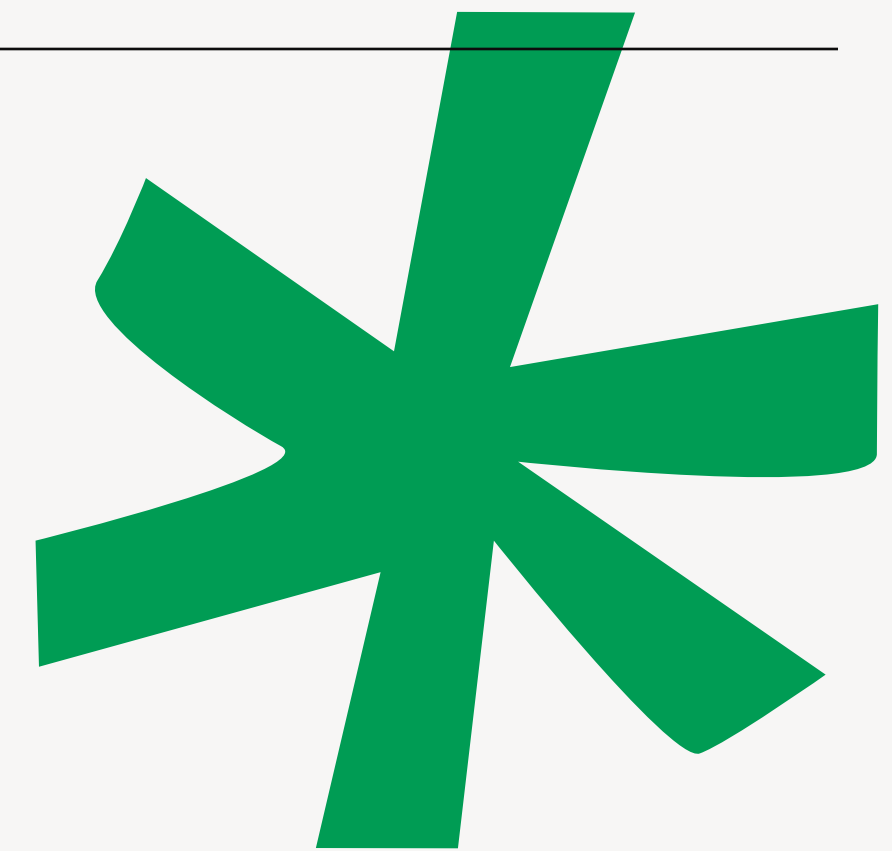
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# Introduction

The Internews Health Journalism Network (HJN) is a **global community of** journalists, communicators, digital health innovators, civil-society organisations and technical experts **all who share a passion for accurate health information.**



Currently, the HJN has over

**1,600** from over **86**  
Members Countries

Representing a diversity of communities including traditionally marginalised communities such as LGBTQIA+, refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, and indigenous communities.

We offer members the opportunity to access, contribute and share resources that can add value to their work, enable them to collaborate and benefit from the experience of peers, and access opportunities for career development and growth.

The Mercury Phoenix Trust (MPT) grant totalling £20,000, funded the HJN for one year from September 2022 until August 2023 to further develop and support global reporting and information literacy on HIV/AIDS. We were grateful for the flexibility of the MPT funding to allow us to truly explore what would have the biggest impact for our members of the HJN. After careful consideration, the HJN decided to develop a comprehensive reporting fellowship programme. We humbly thank the MPT for believing in the mission of the HJN to make an impact by raising awareness of under-reported issues within the HIV/AIDS community and to further strengthen global reporting on HIV/AIDS. This opportunity has also elevated the work and reputation of the MPT amongst our growing network. We look forward to future opportunities to collaborate with MPT in the future.

## Developing the Fellowship

In order to craft a truly unique and competitive fellowship opportunity, the HJN team conducted thorough research to better understand the current global reporting landscape on HIV/AIDS. Taking note of key takeaways and messages from the 24th annual AIDS conference hosted in Montreal in 2022, as well as the trending topics forecasted for the International AIDS Society Conference in Brisbane, July of this year, our team monitored new and emerging themes centred around HIV/AIDS research, advocacy and policy development.

**We also spoke with trusted HJN members in countries with high HIV prevalence to understand the issues they were interested in, and were frequently reporting on in their own work.** These issues included prevention and treatment, PrEP, access to care for marginalised and vulnerable populations as well as ongoing research and development of vaccines.

To gain an even greater perspective, the HJN team spoke with global HIV/AIDS and public health experts to gauge how journalists could better report on HIV/AIDS: what areas were not being covered and how to report on complex scientific developments in the field of prevention, treatment and vaccines. In addition, our team conducted desk research on a wide variety of HIV/AIDS related topics.

Pulling all the research together, our team collaboratively designed this unique fellowship that would seek to train, mentor, support and promote journalism focussing on new and emerging topics in HIV/AIDS science and research, advocacy, policy and social justice.

## Fellow Selection Criteria

**The fellowship was designed with mid-career and senior level journalists in mind, as we felt that prior experience in reporting on health, science and HIV/AIDS was necessary in order for fellows to gain the most out of the opportunity.**

The application form assessed journalists' professional experience, interest in HIV/AIDS related issues and topics, passion for health reporting, as well as potential story ideas and their potential social impact should they be successful candidates. An internal judging panel of five persons carefully looked through all applications before shortlisting 25 candidates, and then selecting the final 10. Great care was taken to assess the journalists' motivation for the fellowship, professional experience, story ideas as well as the regions and communities they represented.

It should be well-noted that this fellowship was one of the most sought-over opportunities that the HJN has offered to date, with over 205 applications. This clearly demonstrated to the team the importance of incentivising and supporting reporting on HIV/AIDS, as well as driving community-based conversations around education, prevention and treatment awareness, and emerging science.

# HIV/AIDS Global Snapshot

The data depicted in this map is based on official reports submitted by countries to the World Health Organization, the World Bank and other UN agencies. **In many cases, the official HIV/AIDS infection rates do not reflect the reality, which is likely to have more unreported cases due to a variety of factors.** As demonstrated through the stories of the MPT fellows, in many countries there is an urgent need to increase HIV/AIDS prevention methods and testing.

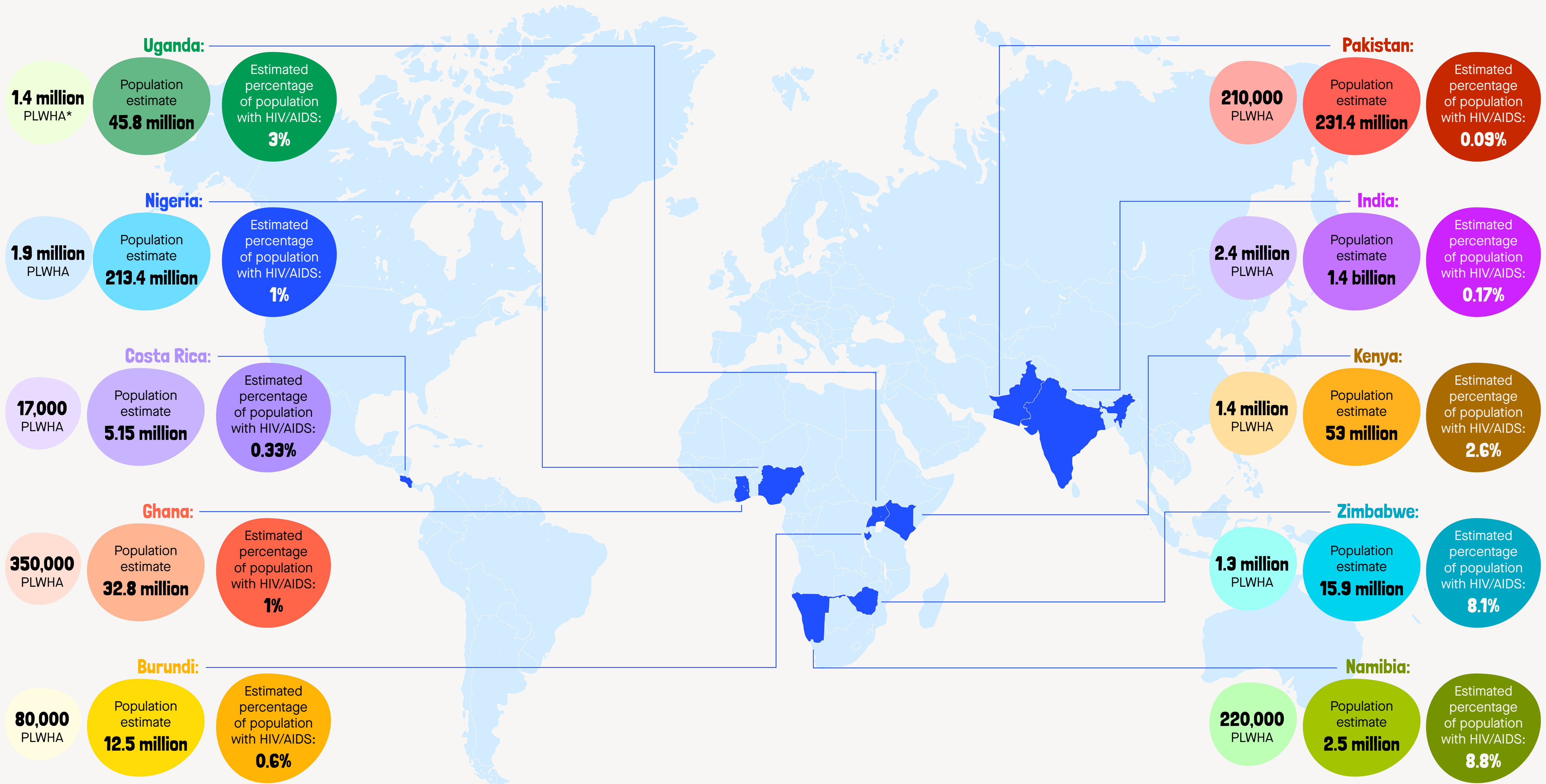
**Sources:**

\*WHO's HIV Intelligence Index dashboard:

\*National AIDS Control Organization & ICMR-National Institute of Medical Statistics (2022). India HIV Estimates 2021: Fact Sheet. New Delhi: NACO, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

\*2021 population data as cited by the World Bank Open Data portal





# Meet the Mercury Phoenix Trust HIV/ AIDS Reporting Fellows

**We have selected 10 fellows from around the world, each representing different communities and cultures.** These fellows share a keen interest in HIV vaccine research and development, community-based information and advocacy work, as well as innovation in emerging technologies.



### Laura Otieno, Kenya

Otieno is a multimedia journalist with 5 years of experience. She began media training in radio while undertaking a bachelor's degree in Media Science at Moi University, Kenya. Over the years, Otieno has gathered a wealth of experience in multimedia, cutting a niche in the broadcasting industry where she currently works as a correspondent for Citizen TV, the leading television station in Kenya commanding over 50% of the country's viewership.

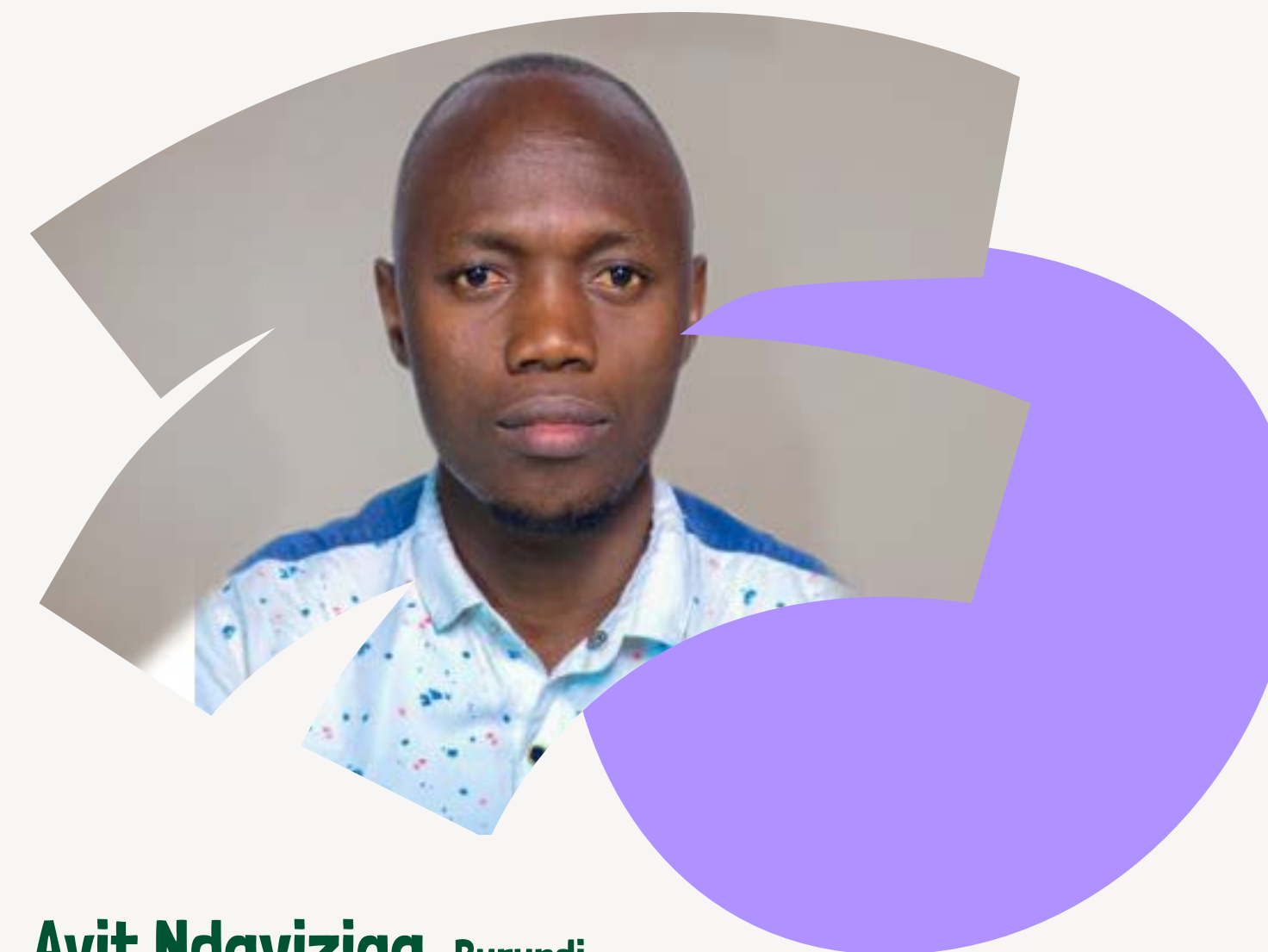
She has received accolades from reputable science organisations such as Infonile and Media for Environment, Science, Health, and Agriculture (MESHA), and most recently, the International Women's Media Foundation and the Agha Khan University graduate school of Media Studies.

Otieno has been awarded grants to report on matters around the environment and health in the Lake

Victoria Basin. She has done stories about how marginalised groups in the Lake Victoria Basin have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic while keeping abreast on matters of the vaccine development for malaria and HIV, as the area she operates in carries Kenya's highest burden of the two and innovative technologies around healthcare.

Her motivation is focussed on the unexplored angles of otherwise widely reported stories across all disciplines, driven by the need to unearth underreported stories and the application of a solutions journalism approach to inform tangible change in society.

"I believe in the agenda-setting role of the media, and I am fully confident that solutions journalism can inspire confidence in societies to enhance better lives and healthier communities."



### Avit Ndayiziga, Burundi

Avit Ndayiziga is a data-driven multimedia journalist based in Burundi. He is the **founder and editor of the Community Voice a community-based media outlet that imagines a place where public opinion is listened to.**

Besides, he works with Radio-Culture; a media organization that promotes positive change through culture-friendly and socially relevant journalism.

His journalistic work revolves around in-depth and data-driven business stories, HIV/AIDS and other health-related stories, innovation and development, environmental issues, climate change, and the social world.





**Aliya Bashir, India**

Bashir is an **independent journalist covering India and Indian-administered Kashmir with a focus on human rights, gender justice, women’s issues, the environment, healthcare, education and minorities.**

She has written and reported for Global Health Now, Missing Perspectives, The Guardian, Time, Lancet Psychiatry, The New Humanitarian, Reuters, Global Press Journal, TRT World and many more. She is the winner of the 2015 Schizophrenia Research Foundation-Press Institute of India “Media for Mental Health” award for best reporting on mental health issues in India. A HEFAT trainee, she has won reporting grants from International Women’s Media Foundation and Population Reference Bureau.



**Katherine Stanley Obando, Costa Rica**

Obando is a **journalist specializing in in-depth reporting on education, mental health, women’s rights, and civil society initiatives.** She is also an experienced nonprofit leader and coach with extensive grant development, research, fundraising and project management experience.

She is the co-founder of the media organization El Colectivo 506 (elcolectivo506.com), a bilingual digital magazine focused on solutions journalism for and from Costa Rica that has achieved alliances with the Solutions Journalism Network, National Geographic Society, and the Carter Center, where she served as a 2022 Mental Health Journalism Fellow. Katherine lives in San José with her husband Adrián and daughter Emma, for whom she wrote “Love in Translation: Letters to My Costa Rican Daughter,” published in 2016.



**Alex Ababio, Ghana**

Ababio, a seasoned journalist and advocate for governance and social justice, possesses extensive experience in research and media.

**He currently serves as the Managing Editor of Ghanaian Watch Newspaper and Ghanaian Watch Online. Additionally, he is the Executive Director/President and founder of the African Liberators Economic Institute.** With a strong commitment to empowering impoverished individuals, Alex envisions cultivating social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for sustainable development in Ghana and across Africa.

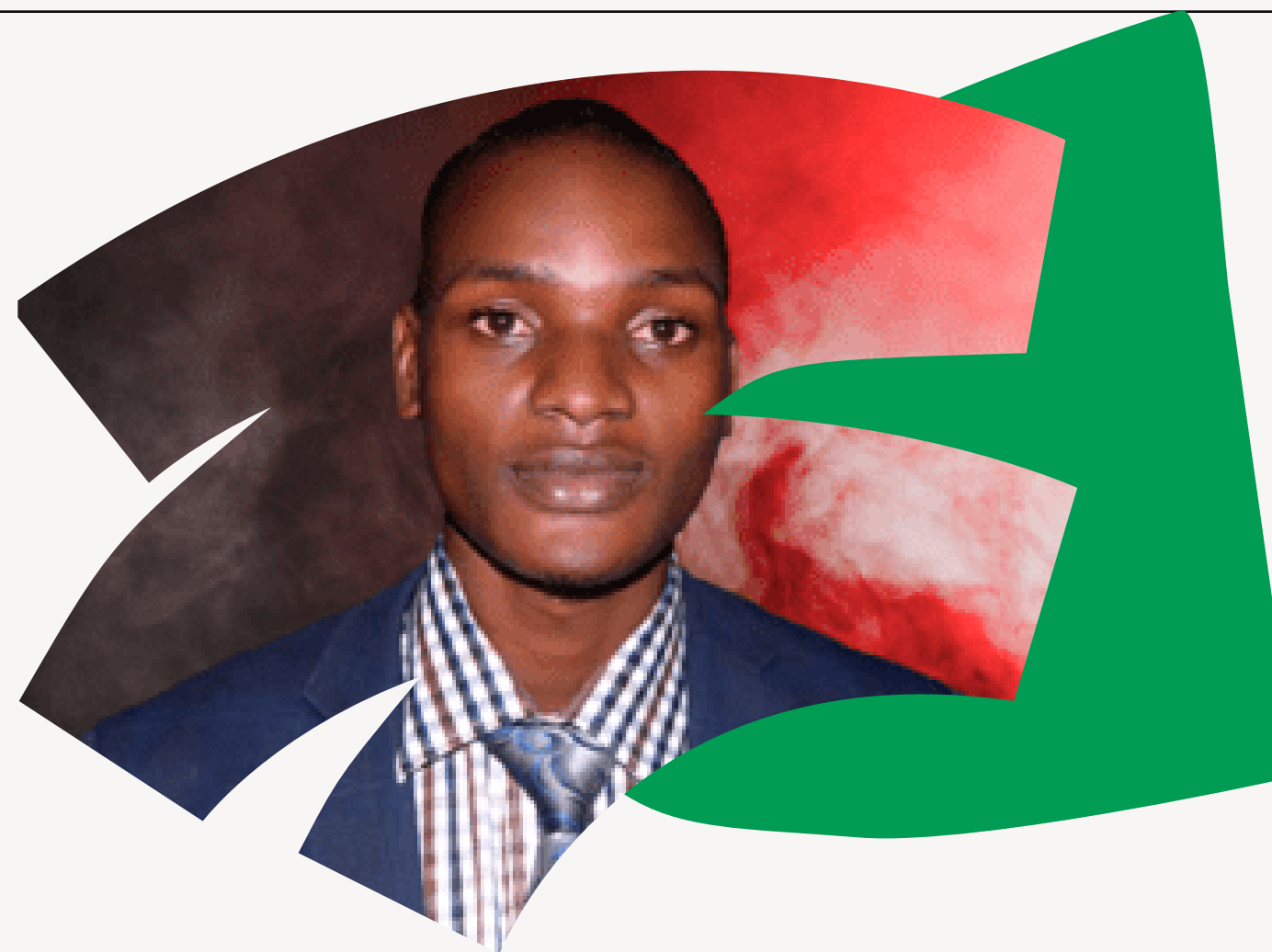
He holds Graduate Diploma in Management Studies from ICM, England, and a Diploma in Commerce from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He has also pursued studies in Newspaper Reporting from ICM, England, as well as Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue from Athabasca University. Furthermore, he is a Thomson Reuters Foundation fellow, having received specialized training in General News Reporting. Alex has also completed Part 1 of the TESOL Certificate program at Arizona State University.



### Ugonna-Ora Owoh, Nigeria

Ugonna-Ora Owoh is a journalist and editor based in Lagos, Nigeria, who indulges himself in being multi-sectoral. His writings span across industries, from different forms and journalistic viewpoints. He writes on politics, fashion, beauty, design, film, and health. He majors as an art journalist who has background knowledge of the art scene in Nigeria, and other parts of Africa. His writings also revolve around sexuality and gender discussions across the African continent.

With over 90 articles in international and locally acclaimed media companies and brands, **Ugonna-Ora has spotlighted the trendy, the best, and the urgent, including profiling and interviewing industry's finest. His byline has appeared in The New York Times, Vogue, TheBody, Dazed, Teen Vogue, Architectural Digest, Essence, Vice, and others.**



### Aaron Ainomugisha, Uganda

Ainomugisha is a Ugandan Investigative Journalist & Social Entrepreneur advocating for empowered communities and better service delivery, with strong interest in tackling the unreported/underreported issues affecting local communities.

He is a Team Leader with RISE NEWS UGANDA NETWORK Mbarara city western Uganda, a network that also feeds many on-air & on-line outlets – with emphasis on in-depth, people-centred & impactful Journalism. He is also attached to 91.2 Crooze FM Mbarara city.

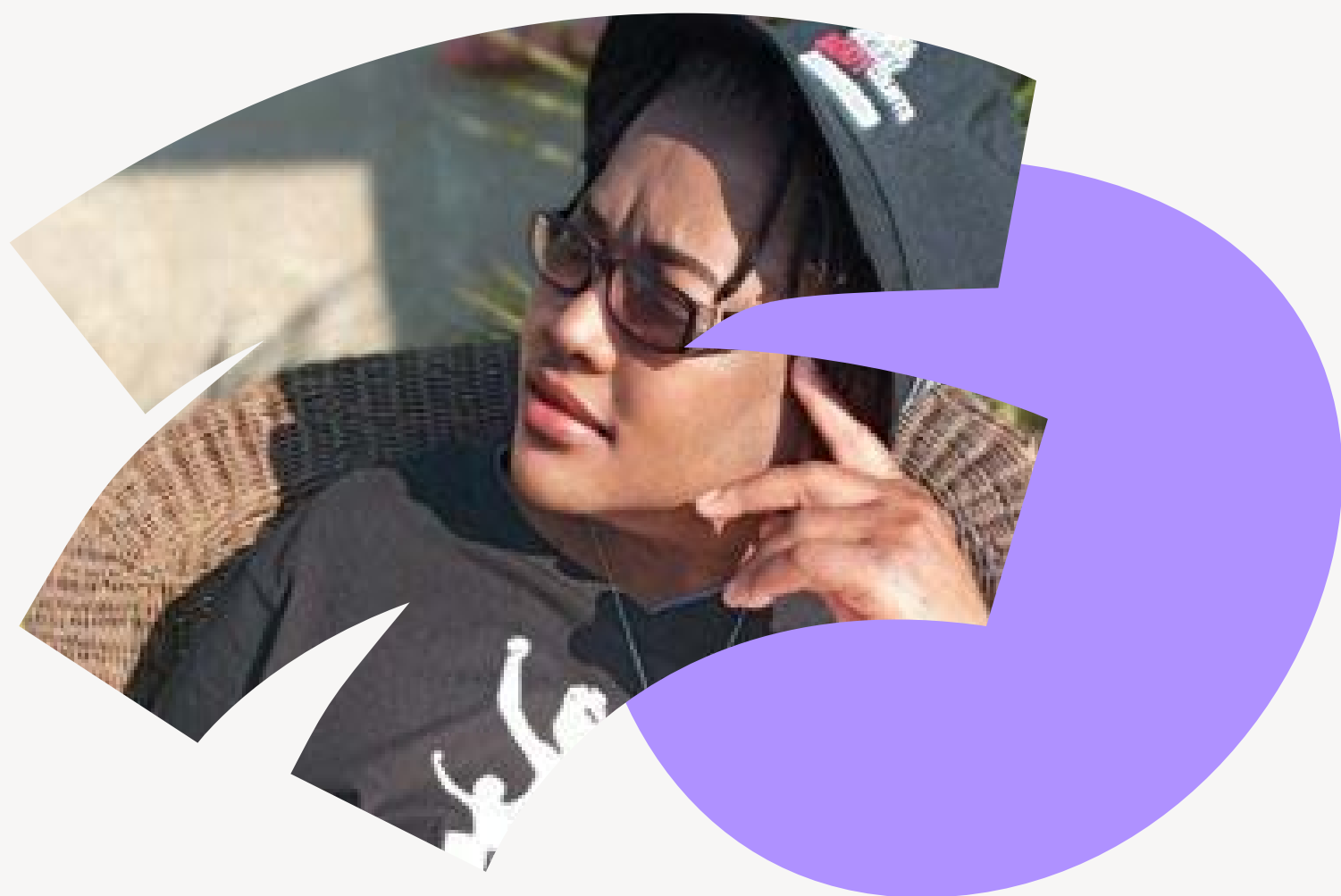
He is the **Founder of RISE for Community & Media Empowerment-UGANDA, Western Uganda Media Centre-WUMEC UGANDA, and Rise Against Poverty Organization-RAP UGANDA.**



### Aletta Shikololo, Namibia

Shikololo is a 24-year-old, award winning journalist and media practitioner from Namibia. **Most recently she received the New Era Journalist of the Year Award for 2022.** She has four years of journalism experience and has extensively covered a wide range of topics including health, politics, human rights, education among other beats. She currently works for the New Era Publication Corporation, a Namibian state-owned newspaper.





### Catherine Mwauyakufa, Zimbabwe

Mwauyakufa is a health journalist living openly with HIV. She is the **Vice Chairman of the Health Communicators Forum, (HCF) which is hosted by the Humanitarian Information Centre, (HIFC). She writes under the name Catherine Murombedzi.** “I decided to be open as a way to encourage pregnant mothers to get tested since I had a successful mother-to-child- transmission prevention story. Since 2009, I have been an advocate and activist for HIV prevention.”

She has sat on the National Aids Council Board representing the media. She has sat on the advisory council to the Ministry of Health and Child Care on ending HIV/AIDS. She sits on the TransSmart board as the Secretary. She is a Fellow of CNS Health of India. Amongst the several local and international awards she has to her cap, Catherine is proud to have been honoured with the Auxillia Chimusoro Communication Award in 2010. The USAID honours individuals or organisations for remarkable contribution to fighting HIV/AIDS.

**“I decided to be open as a way to encourage pregnant mothers to get tested since I had a successful mother-to-child- transmission prevention story. Since 2009, I have been an advocate and activist for HIV prevention.”**

**– Catherine Mwauyakufa**



### M. Waqar Bhatti, Pakistan

M. Waqar Bhatti is an **investigative journalist associated with English-language daily The News International and news channel Geo News, Pakistan as a special correspondent covering health, environment and climate change.**

He has over 22 years of experience in the field of journalism as print, electronic and digital media journalist and during his career, he did investigative stories in the field of medicine and drugs, militancy, politics and economy.

Born in Karachi, he studied biological sciences followed by graduation in mass communication from University of Karachi and started his career from Pakistan Press International (PPI) News Agency as a reporter in 1999. In 2007, he joined The News International and Geo News as senior reporter and travelled to different countries of the world covering health, diplomacy, militancy, conflict, climate change and economic issues.

*During the production phase of this fellowship, the HJN and Mr. Bhatti had disagreements about reporting style and framing of HIV in vulnerable communities in Pakistan. Mr. Bhatti and the HJN agreed to amicably part ways in the course of this fellowship.*



# Expert- led training sessions

A crucial part of the fellowship programme was the opportunity for fellows to learn from global experts in the field of HIV/AIDS. The HJN team organised four unique training sessions that were compulsory for fellows to attend. Each session focussed on a different thematic area of HIV/AIDS that all of the fellows had expressed communal interest in on their initial applications.

**The purpose of these training sessions was two-fold: to inform and inspire reporting on underreported or complex topics relating to HIV/AIDS.** These training sessions also serve as a bridge between journalists and global experts which fosters both relationships and trust between both parties. Fellows were also provided ample time to interact with each speaker at the end of each session.

## Session 1: Jacque Wambui, Kenya

Wambui is the Global CAB Facilitator at the AfroCAB Treatment Access Partnership. AfroCAB is a network for community HIV treatment advocates across Africa. Her education background is in HIV counselling and training. She is an HIV positive treatment and prevention activist who has a special interest in the rights of HIV-positive people and adolescent girls, and young women (AGYW), and advocating on their behalf. She has more than 10 years' experience actively working in programs focused on HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Kenya.

**Her work experience has seen her take the lead in various advocacy campaigns that affect people living with HIV, AGYW in Kenya, regionally and globally.** Jacqueline is the winner of the AIDS 2020 Women, Girls and HIV Investigator's Prize.

Wambui shared her powerful testimony, as well as her insights into reporting accurately on treatment, prevention as well as mother to child transmission.



Having started Optimal HIV treatment - ART, easier as they are better drugs; one can be empowered enough to deal with the shock of positive status, take control over this aspect and carry on to live a fulfilling positive life

JACQUE WAMBUI, KENYA



Journalist or activist? Two entirely distinct beats, or can they coexist? (A discussion that has lasted for forty years.)

PAULA ANDALO, USA

Internews Health Journalism Network

## Session 2: Paula Andalo, United States of America

Andalo is the Spanish News Editor at Kaiser Health News, an independent news platform covering public health in the U.S. In her current role, she provides reliable health information to the Latino populations in the U.S. Paula has over 25 years of professional experience as a health journalist and news editor in both Argentina and the U.S.

In her career, **Andalo has reported extensively on HIV/AIDS, especially in the early years of the epidemic. She is the author of "The Media Virus: How the HIV Broke into the Press and Changed the Rules," a book originally written in Spanish and published in 2020. In the U.S.** Paula has been Managing Editor of El Tiempo Latino, the weekly Spanish newspaper once owned by The Washington Post, and Spanish Editor with the Pan-American Health Organization. In her career, Paula has received numerous awards, including one from the Argentine Academy of Medicine, and the National Association for Hispanic Publications. She has also been a Knight Fellow with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and with the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Andalo's session grappled with the question of "journalist or activist?" Can these two co-exist or are they separate beats entirely in the media landscape? Her session resonated with many of the fellows, particularly those based in regions with ongoing social conflict and human rights issues.

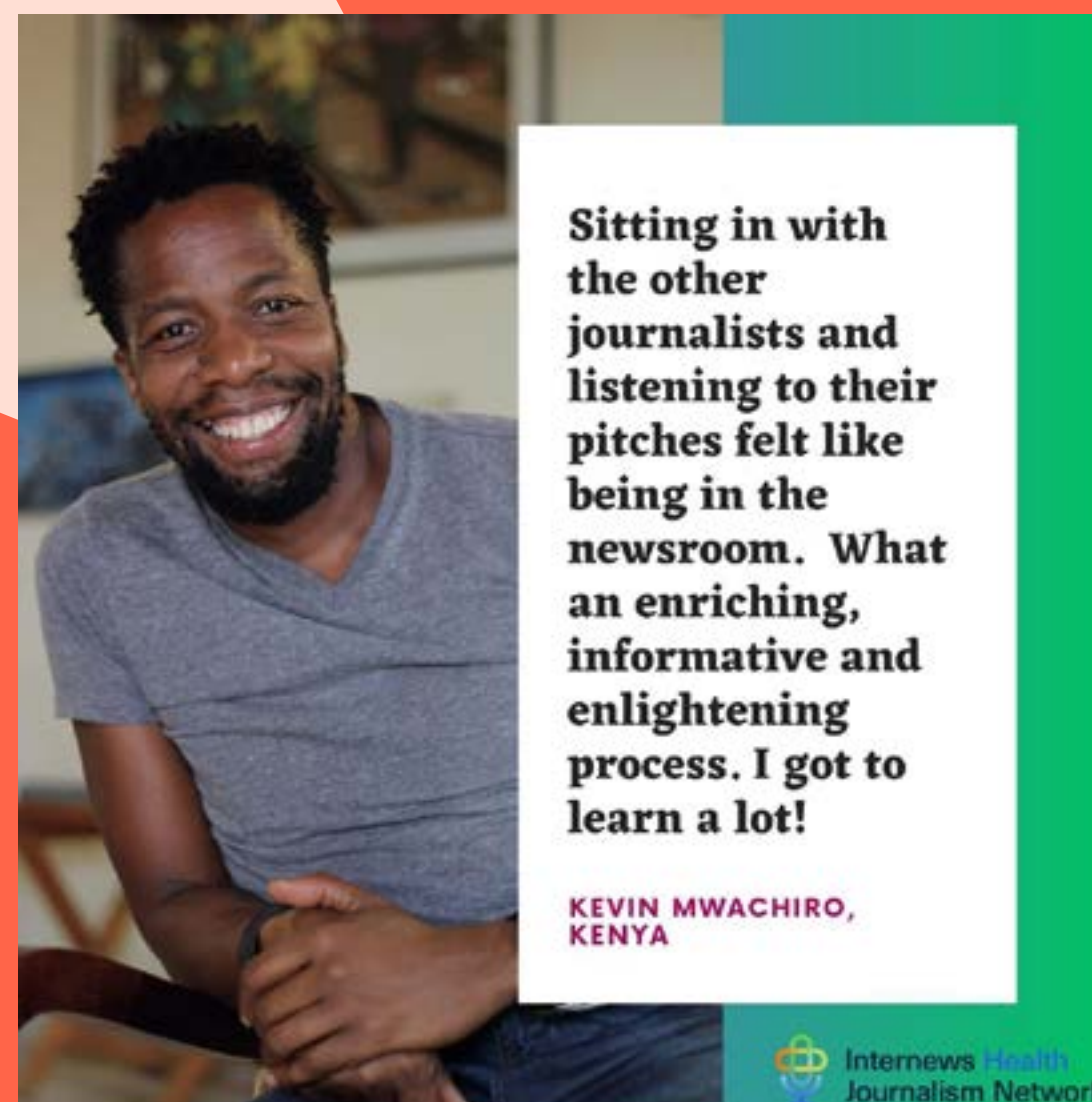


### Session 3: Professor Linda-Gail Bekker, South Africa

Professor Bekker (MBChB, DTMH, DCH, FCP (SA), PhD) is the Director of the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre at the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, University of Cape Town, and Chief Executive Officer of the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation. She is a physician, scientist and infectious disease specialist.

**Her research interests include programmatic and action research around antiretroviral roll out and TB integration, prevention of HIV in women, youth and MSM.** Prof Bekker served as President-Elect (2014- 2016) and then President (2016-2018) of the International AIDS Society. She is a A+ rated scientist, has published >600 peer-reviewed papers.

**Prof Bekker's technical session gave fellows a comprehensive overview of the exciting scientific research and developments on new paradigms for HIV prevention, such as long-acting PrEP and injectable CAB-LA.**



### Session 4: Kevin Mwachiro, Kenya

Kevin Mwachiro is a writer, podcaster, journalist, and queer activist. His professional media and communications career is over twenty years old. Mwachiro's first book is, *Invisible – Stories from Kenya's Queer Community*. He was part of the editorial team for *Boldly Queer - African Perspectives on Same-sex sexuality and gender diversity*. Mwachiro's most recent work of fiction is the short story *Number Sita*, published in the anthology *Nairobi Noir*. His play, *Thrashed*, is part of the Goethe Institut's "Six and the City" collection.

**Mwachiro also writes articles and opinion pieces for several media platforms and is published in various cultural journals.** He uses his profile to champion for LGBTQI+ rights in Kenya and the continent and to raise awareness on the blood cancer, Multiple Myeloma.

He is a co-founder of the Out Film Festival, the first LGBTQI film festival in East Africa which was founded in 2011. In 2017, he founded the storytelling podcast, *Nipe Story (Tell Me a Story)* that produces audio versions of short story fiction from Africa. *Nipe Story* was one of 13 African podcasts that were recipients of the initial African Podcast Fund initiative that was setup by Spotify in 2022.

**Mwachiro's session served as a mock newsroom for the fellows to workshop their story pitches and ideas. Each of the fellows had one on one engagement with Mwachiro, in the presence of their peers, to strengthen their story ideas, brainstorm new angles and sources, as well as consider the potential impacts of their respective stories.**





# Mentoring

The HJN has extensive experience in mentoring journalists around the world, and a commitment to meet journalists where they are. **This means understanding the media contexts they work in and the educational system they have trained in.** Media mentors must have journalism experience as well as cultural sensitivity. Their role is to empower the mentees to find their voice, while encouraging them to go deep into a story, find credible sources, back up information with data, and look at new trends or innovative approaches.

# The HJN has extensive experience in mentoring journalists around the world, and a commitment to meet journalists where they are.

**A mentor understands the media contexts of the mentee and the journalism education they may have received. Media mentors have journalism experience as well as cultural sensitivity.**

For the MPT fellowship we matched media mentors with fellows based on the mentor's experience with the story focus, familiarity with the local media context, language skills, and shared interests. Since the calibre of the fellows was high, we identified mentors who could offer guidance and support throughout the planning, production, and finalisation phases of the stories. Mentors acted as sounding boards, advisors, coaches and peers. We encouraged them to be active listeners and to evaluate the impact of the final stories.

Reporting on HIV/AIDS, like other health topics, raises ethical concerns around privacy and stigma. Furthermore, in some societies HIV/AIDS reporting is discouraged or even censored. **Mentoring offers journalists a safe space to develop their story ideas and to discuss the risks they may face while reporting.** Mentors can help journalists mitigate these risks by taking critical precautions. Being a step removed from the story, offers a unique opportunity to better evaluate what risks are worth taking and how best to mitigate them.

Mentors guided the fellows in positioning their HIV/AIDS stories within the countries they reported from, but also globally. HIV/AIDS is an infectious disease that affects close to 40 million people worldwide. What happens in any given country needs to be contextualised globally, with the latest data and research. The fellowship not only offered reporters the ability to produce stories focused on HIV/AIDS, but also to set high standards for health journalism in their respective countries. Mentoring, in this case, is about developing the reporting skills that can mainstream health into all the newsrooms.

## A Bit About the Mentors

**Bea Spadacini**, Manager of the HJN and **Kathryn Cleary**, Member Engagement Coordinator of the HJN

Spadacini and Cleary have extensive history reporting on and human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a deep app for the conditions and challenges that members of the HJN face in their media landscapes.

**Paula Andalo**

Ethnic Media Editor for Kaiser Family Foundation and author of *The Media Virus: How HIV Broke into Newsrooms and Changed the Rules* (Spanish original)

**Ankur Paliwal**

An independent science journalist who writes about science, inequity, and the LGBTQI+. He is also the founder and managing director of *Queerbeat*, a collaborative journalism platform that focuses on covering the LGBTQI+ community in India

**Chaacha Mwita**

Journalist and public policy advocate. Mwita is a senior health journalist trainer, on behalf of *Internews*, with *AVAC*, an HIV/AIDS prevention and advocacy organisation.

**Graziella Almendral**

An *Internews* media mentor focussing on Latin American. Almendral is an awardwinning science journalist, Spanish TV commentator, and President of the Spanish Association of Health Journalist

## What Mentors Say



**“It was truly a privilege to have the opportunity to mentor some incredible journalist fellows. They chose bold and underreported subjects intersecting HIV/AIDS, stigma and discrimination in LGBTQ+ communities.**

The experience of engaging with the fellows to sharpen their story angles, help them overcome reporting challenges and seeing them improve their drafts was an immensely satisfying experience. I realised that some of these fellows work with a fast news cycle, in which it is difficult for their editors to give detailed feedback, mentoring helped bridge that gap.”

– Ankur Paliwal



**“It was a great journey to work with Internews’ fellow Katherine Stanley while she was giving birth to her amazing investigation about HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica.**

Helping her with the narrative, the testimonies, the discussion, the angles, made me think a lot about how important it is to maintain high standards in our work as reporters and editors. This is key to being a reliable source of information and to fight what seems to be an epidemic these days: misinformation.”

– Paula Andalo



**“I am both grateful and pleased to have mentored two journalists under this project.**

Although they had different needs, which I was happy to serve, they both reminded me of virtues I had nearly forgotten - courage, humility, and gratitude. This project was, therefore, an opportunity for me to make a contribution, as well as to learn from in a tangible way!”

– Chaacha Mwita



# Fellowship Stories







## Despite a Notable Decrease in HIV/AIDS prevalence in Burundi, Stigmatization exists

Avit Ndayiziga, Burundi

In Burundi, as elsewhere in the world, HIV/AIDS prevalence has significantly declined however, HIV/AIDS stigma remains a hushed reality on the ground among people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). **A research study on stigma in Burundi published in 2021 reveals that 41.8% of people living with HIV/AIDS face discrimination and 57.2% experience self-stigma, in other words, they feel sorry or bad for themselves.** Furthermore, fear of discovery of HIV status leads PLWHA to hide their seropositivity, making it difficult to treat the disease, as stigma has also been associated with non-adherence to ART. In this article, Ndayiziga explores the impact that stigma has on people living with HIV/AIDS.

Through interviews with people who have experienced various degrees of stigma and discrimination, he highlights their suffering and that of their children. Ndayiziga, who attended the 12th IAS Conference on HIV Science in Australia in July 2023, quotes UN officials who highlight how stigma and discrimination undermine HIV prevention and treatment programs.

[Go to story](#)



## Sex Behind Bars

Aletta Shikololo, Namibia

Shikololo's print article delves into the topic of sexual activity and the spread of HIV/AIDS among the incarcerated population in Namibia. **Over a decade ago in Namibia, there was a push by human rights advocates for the distribution of condoms in prisons.** However, this proposal was rejected by lawmakers because of laws criminalising same-sex sexual activities.

As part of her investigation, Shikololo spoke with both former and current inmates who shared their experiences of living with HIV/AIDS in prison. During her interviews with current inmates, she encountered strict limitations on discussing sexual activities in prison. The issue of HIV/AIDS in Namibian prisons and holding cells remains largely overlooked. Addressing this issue is essential to effectively combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in Namibia's correctional facilities and beyond.

[Go to story](#)



## HIV in Costa Rica

Katherine Stanley Obando, Costa Rica

Obando produced a four-part written series for digital magazine, El Colectivo 506, that took an in-depth look at mental health and HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica.

**The series tells the stories of 3 residents at a nonprofit HIV/AIDS home for vulnerable populations in the Costa Rican city of Cartago, and, through their experiences, examines the interaction of mental health challenges and HIV treatment** in a country renowned for its health care infrastructure. Interviews with Sofia, Alonso, and Miguel, as well as mental health professionals, HIV specialists and more, show that stigma and prejudice surrounding HIV/AIDS continues to be prevalent, and has a significant impact on the outcomes of patients.

[Go to story 1](#)

[Go to story 2](#)

[Go to story 3](#)

[Go to story 4](#)





## Key Populations Seeking HIV Care Choke on Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Act

Aaron Ainomugisha, Uganda

On 26th May 2023, President Yoweri Museveni assented to Uganda’s new Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA 2023), prompting some organisations and individuals to run to court seeking its annulment amidst mixed local and international reactions.

President Museveni described the response as a “war”. **In his story, Ainomugisha highlighted the challenges members of Uganda’sLGBTQIA+ community face with accessing HIV/AIDS care.** His investigation focussed on western Uganda, but drew connections to other parts of the country.

[Go to story](#)



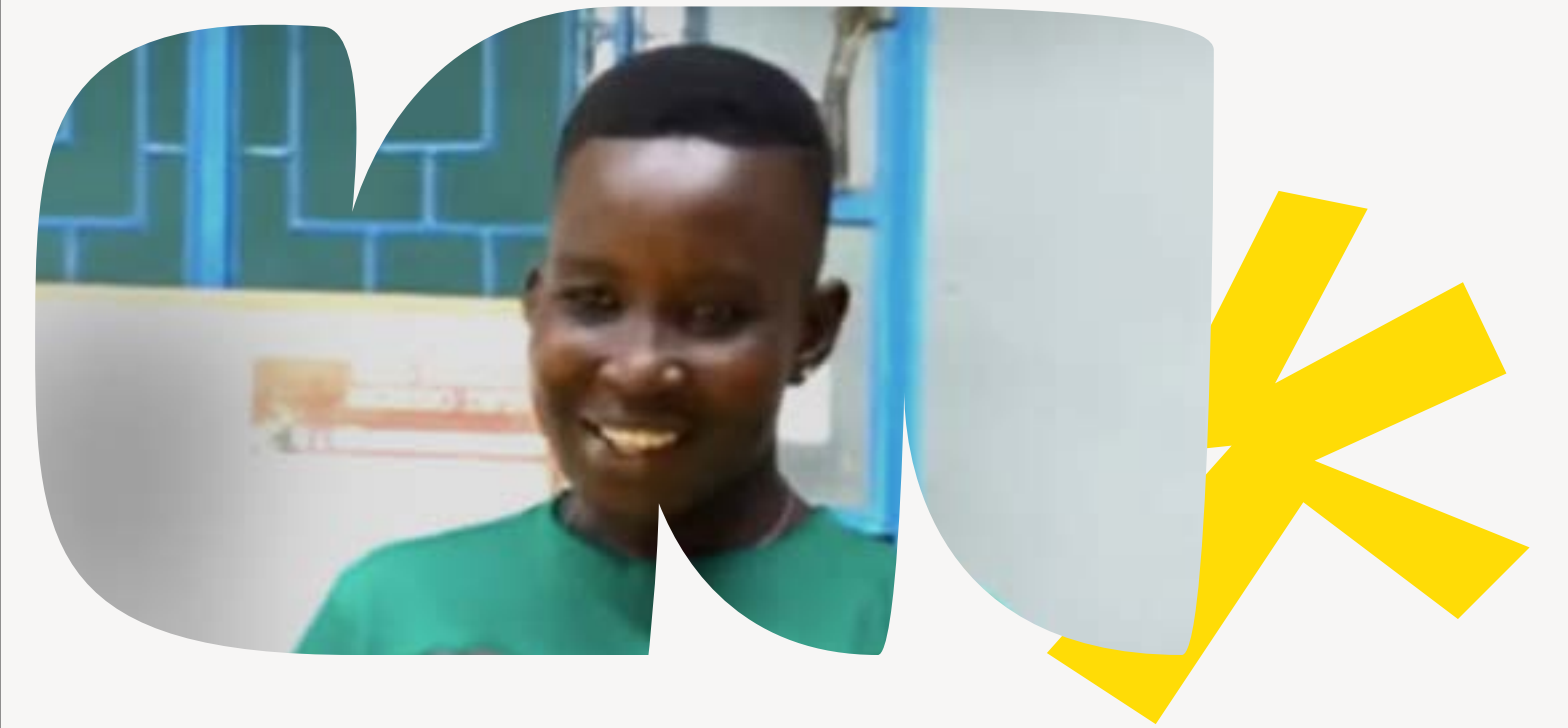
## The Fight against HIV in Nigeria has been meteoric but the battle is non-inclusive of LGBTQ+ Nigerians

Ugonna-Ora Owoh, Nigeria

Owoh reports on the barriers LGBTQ+ Nigerians’ face when accessing the public healthcare system, especially when seeking prevention and treatment therapies for HIV/AIDS. **Owoh details testimonies of individuals who have experienced discrimination and stigma due to their sexual orientation while seeking care.**

Supported by data on HIV/AIDS as well as policy, Owoh’s story shines light on the daily challenges faced by the queer community that greatly impact the country’s ability to fight HIV/AIDS. This story was published during the month of October on The Body, an online resource and news site for HIV/AIDS related content. cells remains largely overlooked. Addressing this issue is essential to effectively combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in Namibia’s correctional facilities and beyond.

[Go to story](#)



## Bending the HIV Curve

Laura Otieno, Kenya

After recording a spike in new HIV infections after nearly one decade, the Kenyan government is developing more inclusive HIV prevention technologies, in order to stay on course in the fight against the HIV epidemic. **Data from 2021 shows that 53% of new HIV infections were among the adolescent population and that children as young as 9 years are sexuallyactive.** Stretching limited donor funding and scaling up partnerships, Kenya’s Ministry of Health is developing HIV prevention technologies for adolescents, who have otherwise shown low adherence to existing prevention methods such as condoms and the uptake of PrEP.

Legal hurdles prevent the roll out of these new technologies, such as the dapivirine ring to those below the age of 18 years. In this television feature, Otieno speaks with community peer educators, scientists, and representatives of the Kenyan Ministry of Health and examines the push to change the law in order to allow those below the age of 18 access to sexual reproductive health services.

[Go to story](#)





## Shame and Stigma Makes HIV treatment Worse for Women And Children in India

Aliya Bashir, India

Bashir's story, published in The Guardian's global development section online in October, uses personal testimonies and data to highlight the devastating impacts of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS in India. **She hears the heartbreaking tale of a mother whose daughter fought to know the truth behind her frequent bouts of sickness, yet the mother struggled to reveal the truth to her of her positive status.**

Bashir also shines light on an orphanage for children with HIV/AIDS, most who were abandoned by their parents due to their status and the stigma that it carried. Her report emphasises the need for more interventions to address the country's epidemic, and the vulnerabilities women and children face as a result.



## A stitch in time can save nine for Zimbabwe

Catherine Murombedzi, Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, **Murombedzi reports on the challenges facing persons living with HIV who are forced to go on second and even third line treatment regimes.** The growing number of patients failing HIV treatment is a cause for concern. The most common reason for changing from first line to second or third line treatment is if the first line treatment fails, which can only be determined through viral load testing.

While diagnosing HIV is relatively simple, determining treatment failure requires different testing methods, which pose challenges to patients in terms of accessing testing centres, availability of electricity and other logistical difficulties. Her report also examines the national and international funding implications for sourcing second and third line treatment regimes.

[Go to story](#)



## Transcending Taboos and Illegality: Pioneering Inclusivity in Ghana's HIV Solutions through Legalized Commercial Sex Work

Alex Ababio, Ghana

In Ghana, where over 100,000 individuals remain unaware of their HIV status due to inadequate testing. Female sex workers bear the brunt of stigma, legal barriers, and restricted healthcare access. **Ababio's article underscores the urgency of collective action on a national scale, emphasising the importance of prevention, testing, and treatment for this vulnerable group.**

Through the lens of Maame Akua's story, a resilient sex worker who, despite her adversities, becomes an HIV peer educator following her mother's battle with AIDS, Ababio's report highlights the global significance of mental well-being and the pivotal role played by NGOs in supporting sex workers worldwide, addressing their mental health needs, and imparting practical skills scientists, and representatives of the Kenyan Ministry of Health and examines the push to change the law in order to allow those below the age of 18 access to sexual reproductive health services.

[Go to story](#)



# Reinforcing Powerful Health Journalism Globally

Health news rarely makes the headlines unless there is a disease outbreak or humanitarian crisis. At the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in the 1980s and 1990s, newsrooms around the world slowly began to cover this virus more regularly. Unfortunately, it took years for the media to overcome its own bias towards people living with HIV and to avoid language that could fuel and perpetuate stigma. **After great strides were made in both HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment therapies, reporting on this topic and, health reporting in general, took a back seat.** A similar trend happened with COVID-19.



The reality is that most newsrooms struggle to remain economically viable and funding for quality journalism, and health journalism in particular, is limited. This is true everywhere, but especially in the Global South where there are many other equally important priorities to cover in the media. Health as a newsbeat is often de-prioritised behind politics, economics, crime and corruption. Despite its intersectoral nature, health is often treated as an ad hoc issue, unworthy of ongoing attention, unless there is a crisis.

**This fellowship has empowered experienced journalists who are genuinely interested in reporting on health, to focus on HIV/AIDS, a disease that according to UNAIDS can be ended by 2030 with enough political will and financial commitment.** Journalists have an important role to play in holding governments accountable, addressing stigma, and sharing the latest research on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in language that their audiences can understand.



## Misinformation and Disinformation

During the COVID-19 pandemic the world saw an equally troubling pandemic: an infodemic, which the World Health Organization defines as too much information, including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. Social media plays a big role in amplifying inaccurate information, which can be fatal when it comes to health. It can also exacerbate health inequities and inhibit access to medicines and services.

In the era of 'fake news', health journalism is more essential than ever. Well trained health journalists can help the public discern evidence-based information, from false claims. Though rumours are common during disease outbreaks, countering these by leveraging social media and other popular channels, like community radios and town criers, is strategic and necessary. The MPT grant has enabled the HJN to strengthen the health reporting skills of local journalists in ten countries. **The HIV/AIDS stories they produced are grounded in facts, research and showcase important testimonies and lived experiences from people in their communities. Their work sets the bar for quality reporting in health and contributes to countering false information.**

## Fighting Stigma, Discrimination, and Inequality

The stories produced by the MPT fellows cover a range of HIV/AIDS-related topics, from prevention and education to treatment and advocacy for people living with HIV, and at-risk populations. In many cases, the reporting by the fellows touched upon structural issues and policies that fuel stigma, discrimination, and inequality. Pushing the boundaries of public discourse to challenge structural bias is critical to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

The fellow from Uganda, for instance, investigated the impact of the draconian Anti-Homosexuality Act that was passed in May of 2023. His story details how the law is making it harder for members of the LGBTQI+ community to seek care for HIV/AIDS. Another fellow in Namibia focused on HIV transmission inside prisons and how the lack of nutritious food is affecting inmates with HIV/AIDS who are taking antiretroviral drugs. In Costa Rica, a fellow worked on a four-part series on the state of HIV/AIDS in the country and investigated the root causes of persistent discrimination towards people living with HIV.

**These, and all other stories produced with this grant, are contributing to position health journalism as an important news beat capable of challenging the status quo.** HIV/AIDS, in this case, is an entry point for assessing the state of health journalism locally and for challenging unjust policies that perpetuate exploitation and further marginalise entire communities.

The generous support of the MPT is not only positioning HIV/AIDS as a critical health story in 2023, but is contributing to strengthening the quality and reach of health journalism globally.



# MPT Fellowship Impact

This fellowship has had a lasting impact both on the fellows themselves, as well as their work. **This opportunity allowed a select group of journalists from different parts of the world to connect, learn, and engage** with one another in a way that would not ordinarily be possible without the external facilitation and collaboration with the HJN, through the generous funding of the MPT.

The fellows learned new information about HIV/AIDS research, treatment, prevention as well as the systemic social issues PLWHA face all over the world. The power of new information helped to inspire the fellows' journalism, create space for new conversations in their communities, as well as catalyse timely follow-up stories and ongoing reporting on the subject.

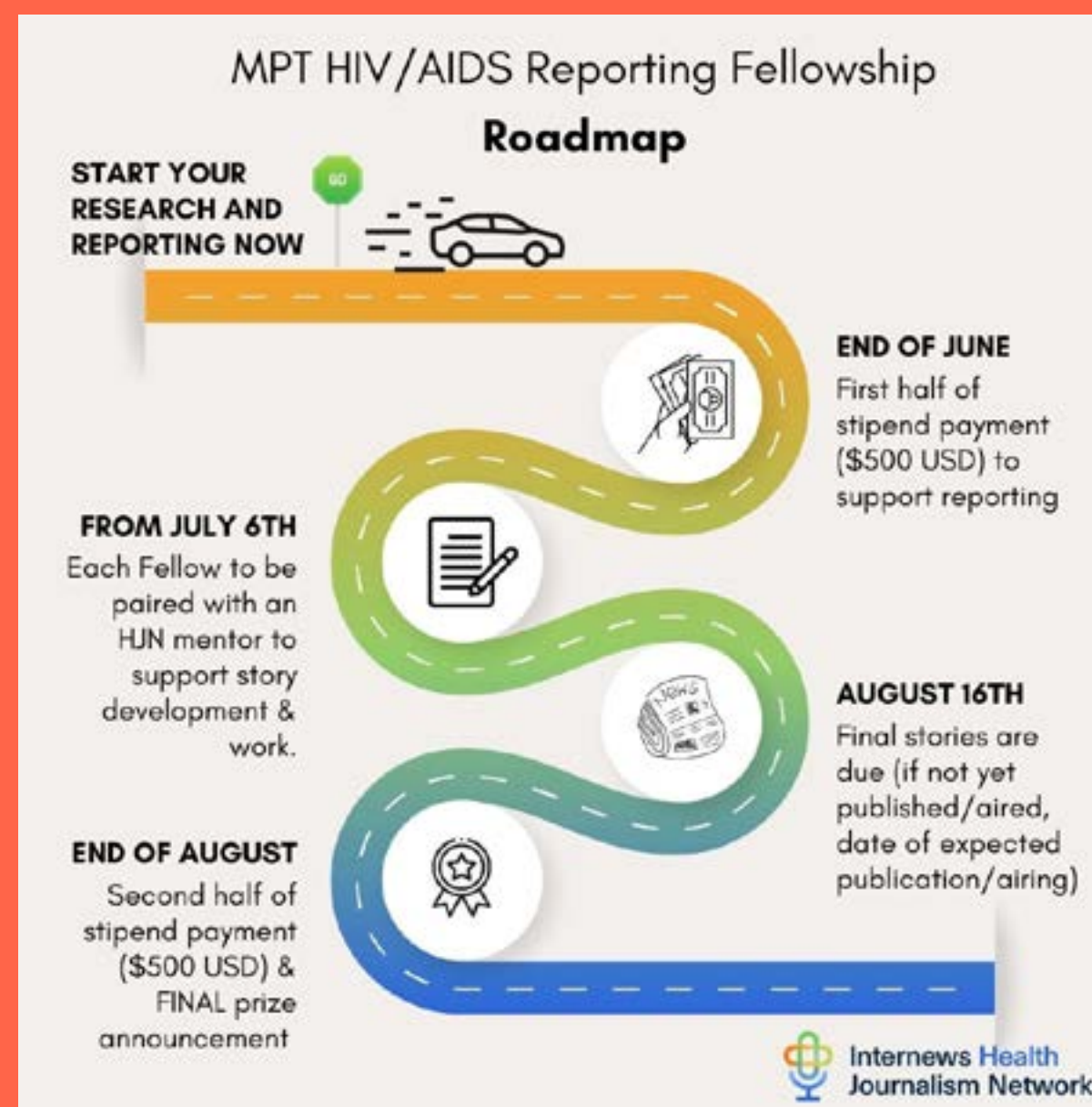
**The power of new information helped to inspire the fellows' journalism, create space for new conversations in their communities, as well as catalyse timely follow-up stories and ongoing reporting on the subject.**

Each of the fellows have truly become stewards for impactful journalism on HIV/AIDS, and will serve as positive role models for their colleagues and peers going forward in their respective media outlets.

**Fellows also gained new insights into HIV/AIDS epidemics in other countries by regularly engaging with their peers through an established Whatsapp group**, as well as during the virtual training sessions. Fellows bonded over the similarities in their reporting topics, the issues they face in their respective countries, as well as the respect and support for one another's final published stories. It is the hope of the HJN that the professional relationships built throughout this fellowship will be long-lasting and fruitful for the fellows' careers.



The Whatsapp group was a convenient and organic way of fostering engagement amongst the cohort of fellows. **The HJN team used the group as a way of communicating updates, responding to questions, addressing concerns as well as sharing resources.** We used vibrant graphics to showcase the fellowship roadmap, as well as save the dates for important training sessions and deadlines. Fellows also used the group to share and discuss stories that they had published on HIV/AIDS with their peers.



## Storytelling that makes a difference

**Following the publication of the fellowship stories, the HJN checked in with each fellow to hear about the feedback they had received in their communities. Many of the stories spurred conversation amongst members of government, civil-society actors, as well as United Nations officials.**

**In Uganda,** Ainomugisha's story gained the attention of Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. The Ministry of Health in Uganda also issued a press release shortly after the publication of the story calling for healthcare service providers to not discriminate against any persons seeking care. Ainomugisha continues to pursue follow-up stories, keeping the discussion moving forward.

**In Kenya,** Otieno's story was ranked number 1 on Citizen TV during the week it was originally broadcast. Her feature was also broadcast in kiSwahili as well Dholuo languages to reach a wider audience. She received positive feedback from members of parliament as well as the Director of MOSAIC, an organisation working on HIV/AIDS prevention technologies for teens. **She was also requested to put forward the story in print for the Media for Environment, Science, Health and Agriculture (MESA).** Additionally, during an AIDS conference that took place in Mombasa at the end of August, the issue of the inclusion of teens in HIV/AIDS prevention was discussed at length.

**In Namibia,** Shikololo's story on HIV in Namibian prisons has sparked debate in parliament. Early September, a member of parliament posed a question during a parliamentary session directed at the Minister of Health, inquiring about a strategy for reducing HIV/AIDS transmission in prisons. The question referenced her article. In response, the Minister of Health stated that they would collaborate with the Ministry of Safety and Security to investigate the "allegations in the media" regarding rape and sexual activities within prisons. Since the publication of the article, this issue has sparked significant public debate and has reignited discussions about amending the Sodomy Law (common law prohibits same-sex relations).



## What the fellows are saying...

"This fellowship has been an insightful journey in my career as a health reporter. From the sessions we had with experts, to the peer discussions within the fellowship, and the mentorship provided,

**I have gained invaluable experience that has enhanced my approach on storytelling,**

with my editors admitting that my style of journalism has majorly improved over the last few months. The Internews Health Journalism Network, and this fellowship, are bright feathers on my hat, which I will wear and walk with my head high and not only tell better health stories, but also teach my peers the invaluable lessons I have picked in this fellowship."

–Laura Otieno, Kenya

**"In my journey to understand the lives of inmates living with HIV,**

I witnessed resilience and hope amidst adversity, reminding us that compassion and support can transform even the harshest of circumstances."

– Aletta Shikololo, Namibia

**"Thanks to the fellowship, I've learned that journalism goes beyond facts; it's about sharing stories that can change lives and inspire hope.**

This experience has not only improved my skills but has ignited a deep passion for telling impactful stories."

– Alex Ababio, Ghana

**"This fellowship has been a game-changer for my journalism career.**

I have not only enhanced my HIV/AIDS reporting knowledge and skills, but I have also linked up with mentors and peers who share a commitment to telling all HIV/AIDS stories to significantly impact its fight. A good story can save lives."

–Avit Ndayiziga, Burundi

**"This fellowship really enabled me to expose the plight of LGBTQIA+ people seeking HIV care after the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023.**

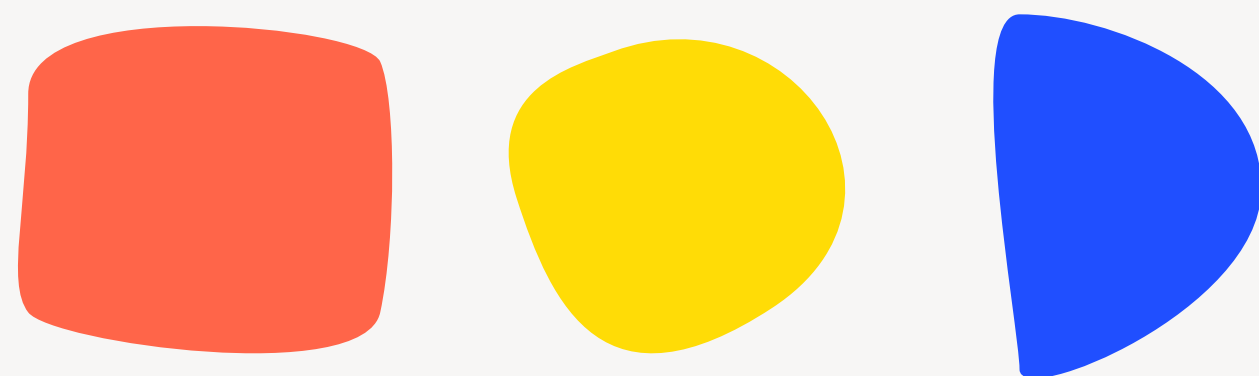
More of such fellowships and other interventions are pivotal in the realisation of in-depth and impactful journalism, especially through extensive coverage of the unreported and underreported issues, and breaking negative stereotypes."

– Aaron Ainomugisha, Uganda

**"This fellowship not only inspired me to complete the story that I proposed during the application process, but also an entire month-long edition of our digital, bilingual magazine, El Colectivo 506 in Costa Rica.**

An award-winning journalist from another publication hopped on board to complement my story with a podcast that further explores the topic of mental health and HIV in Costa Rica. I believe that journalists around the world are eager to explore this topic, but lack the funding and, more importantly, the know-how and connections to do it justice. This fellowship matched those two elements, providing concise and effective training and then letting us get to work. I have been consistently awed by the challenges faced by the other journalists in our cohort, and hope that we will remain in touch so I can continue learning from them, and the trainers and mentors in this program, for years to come. Thank you, thank you, for this program that has allowed me to start to learn about HIV. I hope to continue reporting on this important topic throughout my career."

– Katherine Stanley–Obando, Costa Rica



**"A very riveting adventure**

that showed me more needed to be done in regards to telling stories of people living with HIV in Nigeria."

– Ugonna–Ora Owoh, Nigeria



**"The best part of the fellowship for me was to understand how our language, words and perception can inspire, empower and bring hope to a subject which continues to face stigma.**

Also, I really enjoyed the mentorship as that helped with insights and tips to prepare, plan and address the complexities of the topic in advance, including some of the ethical dilemmas and struggles from the sources that I faced during the journey. I was given all the liberty and freedom to complete my fellowship without any quest to hurry up and rush to meet the deadline."

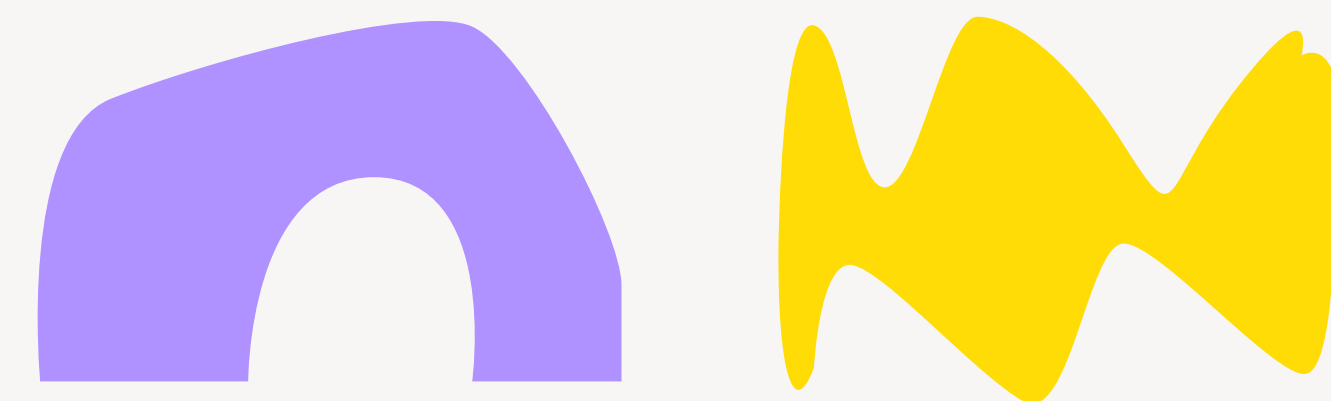
– Aliya Bashir, India



**"I had a superb fellowship where I learned from the best virtually.**

The speakers and presenters were experts, while the interactive sessions were awesome. I felt at home in the learning space. My mentor Chaacha Mwita and fellow from Uganda, Aaron Ainomugisha, were fountains of knowledge. I hope to meet the hosts from the HJN one day in the field. Knowledge is power. Thank you for taking us on an HIV/AIDS capacity development as health science journalists."

–Catherine Mwauryakufa, Zimbabwe





**Editorial Credits:**  
Megan Miller  
Beatrice M. Spadacini  
Kathryn Cleary

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**Design Credits:**  
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