

## **President Sarah Newhall's speech at Pact Tanzania Media Guide launch in Dar es Salaam, February 13, 2004**

Remarks by Sarah Newhall  
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Good afternoon honored guests, members of the government, the donor community, media representatives, partner NGOs. I am excited to be here today for the launch of the Media Guide, A Handbook for Tanzanian Civil Society. I am sure that it will become a best seller!! The vision for this guide and the related public opinion campaign which will unfold over the next months and years is one more critical pillar in strengthening the role and increasing the dynamism and results delivered by civil society in Tanzania. What is at stake in this overall campaign is nothing short of demonstrating in a range of concrete ways the direct assistance and contributions made by civil society organizations and leaders in local communities around your country.

### **Why is this initiative so important?**

Around the world, and I understand also here in Tanzania, NGOS and CBOs have a tarnished image. Some, but thankfully not all, citizens, business leaders, and government officials feel that NGOS are self-serving operations doing little more than creating jobs for friends and relatives. You know, we all drive around in nice cars, carry brief cases, push a lot of paper and don't accomplish much. Some people even think that NGOS are puppets of foreign donors being used to further foreign agendas. Some Zanzibar NGOS are believed to be terrorist fronts. When the general public opinion of NGOS takes such a negative tone it is a breeding ground for distrust and misunderstanding. In the worst cases it can lead to harsh government controls and restrictions being placed on NGOS. And in local communities where NGOS seek to engage with communities and provide development services, it can result in low levels of participation by citizens which can become very self-defeating. When citizens don't participate in community development activities, it leads critics to believe that local NGOS do not represent the communities they serve. This all becomes a vicious circle. If we are seen as no good, it is difficult to do good.

### **What kind of response is necessary to turn this around?**

In the face of such criticism it is important that NGOS actively respond to the challenge to increase public understanding of their role and function in society. This requires having a clearly defined agenda and goals and objectives, setting measurable results targets and tracking them over time, and developing a code of conduct for ensuring a high standard of accountability and transparency among NGOS and CBOS. Corruption of any kind whether it be in the government sector, the commercial sector, or the civil society sector is a betrayal of the public trust. And I firmly believe that it

is the responsibility of civil society to look itself in the mirror, and identify clear ways that it can collectively improve its service delivery, how it conducts its own business, and how it communicates its messages to the general public. It is imperative for civil society which is working for the Common Good, and not private benefit, to have the highest standards of behavior. So the job of changing one's image starts with assessing one's own behavior and creating an action plan for moving forward positively. If we want our image to change, we will probably discover that we need to go about our business in some new ways.

Pact is a global capacity building organization, headquartered in Washington, D.C., with programs in twenty countries around the world. We have been a contributor to successful campaigns to strengthen civil society around the world. Three examples come to mind: first, in Ethiopia when Pact began a program to help strengthen the capacity of NGOS, the reputation of the NGOS was terrible. Almost everyday, negative articles would appear in the local press. It did not matter if the stories were unbalanced or untrue, the common perception was that NGOS were bad. The Ethiopian NGOS worked for two years to create their own Code of Conduct which they presented to the government and to the public. They also waged a campaign with journalists to improve the reporting about development issues. Over a period of three years, the reputation of NGOS, and the level of support for them and trust in them has definitely and dramatically improved. Now government and NGOS are viewed as partners working for poverty reduction and social justice through combined efforts. In Thailand: Pact led a project to train environmental journalists in natural resources management issues, so that their reporting could improve. The increased level in the quality and volume of feature stories on environmental issues changed dramatically. Citizens gained as natural resource exploitation was exposed. In Mongolia, Pact has produced a TV soap opera series on the court system. It has just been rated the number one viewed program in Mongolia!!! I think that here in Tanzania Pact's partners could work together to produce a Radio soap opera series on rural development issues and the ways communities working together can solve problems effectively.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, changing public opinion is a big task and needs to be approached strategically. It requires civil society as a whole to identify its value to society and to map this out carefully. It requires being able to demonstrate community benefits in terms of real results: like more children going to school, more healthy babies, more gender sensitive social policies. It means engaging in a community or civic education process targeting government, school children, community leaders and business leaders and directing specific messages to each group. Finding a way to engage with women and youth will also be very important.

I am delighted to be here for your launch. And I will watch with interest as your campaign unfolds. You are part of a global standards setting movement.

I know that in Tanzania you will be part of the leadership that clearly raises the global bar on civil society contributions to social justice.

Sarah Newhall  
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Washington, D.C.

