Attitudes and perceptions of researchers participating in a research radio programme

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At the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme (KWTRP), a diverse set of engagement approaches are used to foster mutual understanding between researchers and publics and to strengthen ethical and responsive research. Over the last 18 years, the range and depth of engagement have expanded, reaching more communities/publics in response to expanding research sites and audiences. To reach wider population, the engagement team implemented an interactive health research radio programme. The weekly 1-2 hours session involving scientists, MOH staff and community members is tailored to respond to questions raised by the public and to inform about on-going and planned research. In this evaluation, we investigated researchers’ attitudes and perceptions of the radio programme, and the extent to which it responded to and was informed by community needs/concerns. A Theory of Change guided the evaluation. Data collection comprised: five-minutes short video interviews with studio guests (n=3), an online survey with studio guests (n=37) and another online survey with research staff at KWTRP (n=107), conducted between 2020 and 2021. The survey with Programme research staff aimed to gauge understanding of a whole set of engagement activities undertaken in the Programme, including radio. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic framework approach. The survey data was analysed in both RedCap and using excel; and the open-ended questions using thematic framework approach. Findings for both qualitative and quantitative data showed that researchers enjoyed taking part in the engagement activity; receiving pertinent insights from the community, shared from a lay man’s point of view. They also had an opportunity to hear and respond to community questions/concerns in real time which triggered areas to think about in their work and research ideas. Researchers reflected on their work and recognized the importance of disseminating their research to public audiences and communicate science/research to the public in simpler terms. They reported the need for continuous engagement and research done should be people-centred. Where social restrictions curbed face-to-face interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, radio became an important tool for engagement. It reached a wider coverage of population and offered opportunities for co-learning between the researcher and the community members.