



5 Mass media and social media

This approach can help to reduce:

- Internalised stigma
- Social stigma
- Stigma by association
- Structural stigma

See '**Four types of stigma**' (page 15)

The use of mass media, including social media and instant messaging, can bring many benefits, as part of a stigma reduction approach:

Mass media has a great reach, and offers a platform for people with disabilities to have indirect contact and dialogue with community members. For example, they can give personal testimonies on the radio and respond to phone-ins.

It can also provide information in an entertaining and accessible format and engage with hearts and minds through good storytelling, as well as challenging myths.

Those with power can use media as a platform to contribute to influencing social norms around disability. For example, social influencers can engage on stigma issues, and community leaders can contribute to anti-stigma messaging on community radio.

What to consider when using media in your stigma work

- It must be tailored to your target groups, informed clearly by your consultation and analysis. Intersectionality is key here. For example, a social media message aimed at reducing stigma against young women with a neglected tropical disease in a rural context is likely to be very different from messaging planned for older men with a physical disability in an urban context.
- It requires culturally sensitive, positive and accessible messaging using positive representation of people with disabilities: see the resources section .
- Issues of privacy and confidentiality for those engaged in media platforms need to be considered and agreed as part of ethics and safeguarding processes. For example, social media work might generate stigmatising posts, and will need moderation.
- Budget issues are a consideration. Mass media costs can be high, but there is also potential for high reach.
- It may be helpful to look at partnerships with external agencies and organisations with experience in using mass media and social.

Case study: Social media and radio messaging in Nigeria



Recording an episode of Madubi in Nigeria

Inclusive Futures' **family planning project** in Nigeria used social media as one component of a media campaign to address stigma. The digital campaign was designed to reach young people with disabilities and their wider community through micro and nano influencers across Kaduna. Platforms included WhatsApp, X and Facebook, and materials included social media posts and cards, testimonials, street interviews and SMS blasts.

A group of 55 influencers posted weekly key messages to debunk stigmatising beliefs. The messages were carefully tailored based on research to understand local myths and beliefs that were driving stigma. The messages varied by type of disability, context and gender.

The campaign used WhatsApp groups of people with disabilities, which used existing social networks and peer influence to promote family planning inclusivity. In a final evaluation, these direct online discussions were identified as helping to sustain behaviour change, even after a campaign had ended.

The campaign revealed a strong desire among women with disabilities in rural Kaduna to engage with social media for sexual and reproductive health information. However, some groups of people with disabilities may have limited access to the online social media /or limited digital literacy, and moderation of stigmatising comments on social media also has to be carefully managed.

Myth

People with disabilities **shouldn't have children**



Fact

People with disabilities **have the same rights as everyone** to decide whether to have children



The family planning project also used other media formats. In partnership with BBC Media Action, **Nigerian Hausa language radio drama 'Madubi'** was broadcast across Hausa-speaking states, and also presented to small groups using a portable radio device to allow discussion on the topics about women and men with disabilities accessing family planning services.

Case study: Community radio in Ghana

In Sightsavers' **Ghana Participation Programme**, the stigma reduction approach included strong engagement with community radio.

Early research showed that stigmatising language around disability was central to reinforcing negative attitudes. Positive disability language guides were developed and adapted for local languages, with the participation of people with disabilities and a range of other key stakeholders.

These guides were used in various settings to encourage discussion about disability inclusion, including issues of stigma and stigmatising language, which included training radio hosts. This resulted in decreased use of derogatory terms related to disability.

Disability champions used the radio to give personal testimonies and felt that 'call-ins' were valuable to encourage dialogue on taboo and sensitive issues. Collaborating partner organisations, including traditional local leaders, also participated directly in stigma reduction activities, such as putting posters up in their 'palaces' and talking on the radio.



On radio stations, we discussed derogatory names and acceptable alternatives. Anyone using a derogatory name was corrected: we shared how those names affect us.

Partner organisation member,
Ghana Participation Programme study