

Don't be shy to access stimulus packages, Siliya advises media houses

Information and Broadcasting Services Minister Dora Siliya has urged media houses to take advantage of business stimulus packages government has put in place in the wake of the covid-19 to help them survive.

Ms. Siliya says the stimulus packages and the COVID bond are not limited to a specific all business sector but that everyone, including media houses can access the funds.

Speaking when Free Press Initiative Zambia presented a report on a survey to establish the impact of Covid-19 on media as businesses, Ms. Siliya said operators of media businesses should seriously consider taking a chance by applying for the resources to sustain their businesses.

Ms. Siliya who is also Chief Government Spokesperson said the introduction of stimulus financial packages is meant to hold the hands of all business entities that have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic including the media industry.

"Media houses should not be shy to borrow some of these monies so that they can survive in these difficult times," she said.

She said it is the desire of Government to see all businesses thrive even with the coronavirus which she said has had a negative impact on almost all sectors of the economy.

"For the media sector this is very important because like others Journalists are also worried and are not sure if they will have a job tomorrow and so they can only be assured once the sector survives these harsh times," she said.

Ms. Siliya said the stimulus packages and the covid bond are open to both public and private media institutions provided they come up with plans and measures to pay back.

She said the slowdown in business operations especially for the print media provides an opportunity for them and all stakeholders to think of the best way to do their business adding that the print media still experienced challenges even before the outbreak of covid-19.

Ms. Siliya said there need for the sector to think of innovative ways to capture their readership and remain in business under all circumstances.

And Ms. Siliya has expressed gratitude to media houses and journalists for their continued role in the fight against covid-19 through the dissemination of relevant and useful information to the public.

Ms. Siliya said journalists have continued to write stories on COVID-19, including those to do with how the pandemic has affected many citizens in various areas of life such as education and business.

She commended Free Press Initiative Zambia for conducting the survey adding that evidence based discussions, debate and decision making are critical important.

Ms. Siliya said it important that those in the profession of journalism lead in providing discourse in the country that is based on evidence, as it has become common with the advent of social media, to have discussions based on rumors and non-truths leading to fake news.

And Information Permanent Secretary Amos Malupenga said the move by FPI is commendable because all sectors, including the media, raised questions on how they would survive during the pandemic.

Mr. Malupenga said there was need for media houses to be clear on the kind of relief they would want Government to consider to help them survive as Government was also dependent on taxes to offer various services to the public.

Speaking earlier, Founder of Free Press Initiative (FPI) Joan Chirwa says the Free Press Initiative Zambia with support from the World Association of Newspapers commissioned the survey to find out how media houses, as business entities, were surviving in the midst of the pandemic.

She said the survey was important because the pandemic caught the media business, just like other sector, by surprise.

Ms. Chirwa said among key findings of the survey was the fact that a number of media houses including those in the in the public sector are facing similar challenges of reduced revenue making their operations difficult.

She said the report has since recommended that Government seriously considers tax suspension and rebates as a way of helping the sector survive the hash economic challenges as a result of covid-19.

Ms. Chirwa said as the situation stands now, many media houses were finding it difficult to pay salaries and meet other statutory obligations in form of taxes.

She said her organization is optimistic that the report will help Government to come up with specific measures that will help industry players continue operating.

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