Some thoughts on media and sanitation

This is written by me, a Swedish journalist, and I am aware of that may things may differ in other countries and cultures. But some things might also be the same.

• Journalism is in many aspects storytelling.
• Remember that most journalists are not experts in sanitation (or water, development work etc) so try not to use expert terms and language when you present your work or idea.
• Media always want an angle/perspective on an article etc. "What’s the thing?”. News media want to know what is new (invention, new statistics, event, something that has changed etc). If you contact a journalist, or send out an press release etc try to be very clear in your message.
• There are so many different medias (newspapers, magazines, tv, radio, web magazines, global, national, regional, local). It can be good to make an “inventory” of the media you could be able to attract. Read/watch/listen to them, and try to figure out who is their target group, what kind of material they publish. At least in Sweden there are a lot of media that might not be very well known to the public, but would be perfect for an article about sanitation. For example magazines for professionals in water and wastewater treatment, different NGO’s magazines etc.
• Same thing (news, event, project) can have many different angles depending on the media and their target group/readers. Example: An NGO has built a number of ecosan toilets in a village. A local news paper maybe chooses to show how this will influence the life of the locals. A women magazine could show how this will improve the life of the women, or how the women have been involved in the work. Maybe the projects got fundings from a European NGO – and they have a magazine that wants to show the fundraisers how the money is being used. A kids magazine could write about a campaign among children, connected to the ecosan-toilets, about hand washing. Same thing – different angles, different articles/programs.
• Short articles or notes is also worth a lot – it doesn´t have to be big articles or feature stories every time. Sanitation needs to be mentioned a lot, and often.
• Try to find your own “sanitation perspective” on other news and things happening in the world and tip the media.
Examples: floods – the so called waterborne deceases are in fact connected to the lack of sanitation.
Child mortality – give national/local statistics on how many kids that die from diarrhoea
Annual statistics on the state of the world/country – give concrete examples and figures on the sanitation situation, maybe local, and what could be done.
• Get to know reporters. Journalists are humans, we also go to the toilet. Invite journalists to visit your project/NGO/etc.
• Don’t try to control the journalists or what they write. They will not write/make
tv/radio exactly the way you want, and they will most probably use other words than
you do, to describe your work. The journalists might also be critical to your work/NGO,
but that doesn’t have to be bad – it can be a reason to develop. A free press is crucial to a
democratic society.

• Don’t be shy when you talk about sanitation, be outspoken and use a language that
make people understand. People get sick because there is shit everywhere. The shit
pollutes the water that people drink. That is why there is a need for toilets (as an
example).

• Things that journalists like (of course depending in media, target group etc):
  - Statistics (what has changed since last year etc)
  - Real people, practical examples that can show a bigger picture

Some links:
• About the WASH media award
  http://rosegeorge.com/site/wash-media-awards-2/

• Interview with Rose George in Swedish TV:
  http://svtplay.se/v/1903579/korrespondenterna/extramaterial_rose_george_om_det_dolda_hotet

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