

Debate good platform for candidates – ACME

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KAMPALA. The January 15 presidential candidates' debate was a shot in the arm for hitherto little known candidates Gen Benon Biraaro, Joseph Mabirizi, Maureen Kyalya, Abed Bwanika and Venansius Baryamureeba.

According to the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) 'Media Coverage of the 2016 elections January 2016 findings', the five received more media coverage in January than they did in December.

Coverage for Biraaro increased from 0.5 per cent in December to 4.6 per cent through January, Mabirizi (1.3 per cent to 2.5 per cent), Kyalya (0.4 per cent to 3.4 per cent), Bwanika (3.5 per cent to 4.5 per cent) and for Baryamureeba from 1.8 per cent to 6.6 per cent.

But Forum for Democratic Change presidential candidate Kizza Besigye and Independent candidate Amama Mbabazi, did not get more coverage following the debate.

Newspaper coverage of the duo slumped from 19.8 per cent and 28.0 per cent in De-

cember to 16.4 per cent and 22.5 per cent in (January) respectively. Also, radio coverage of Dr Besigye reduced from 20.2 per cent to 14.8 per cent and for Mbabazi from 18.9 per cent to 18.4 per cent.

While releasing January findings in Kampala, ACME's online programme manager Harriet Anena said it follows that as the percentage of one increases, the percentage of the other reduces.

"The debate brought a new perspective to these candidates. How many people knew Biraaro? If the percentage of these four has increased, [for] the other three it reduces," Ms Anena said.

ACME's executive director, Dr Peter Mwesige, added: "We think that that does have some explanation to do with why some people like Biraaro are being given more attention now," Dr Mwesige said.

Ms Anena, also said even with the increased coverage of the five, it is still lower compared to the coverage of the three frontrunners.

President Museveni, just like he did in 1999, 2001, 2006 and 2011, stayed away from the January 15 debate.

The next presidential debate is slated

for February 13.

According to a press statement ACME released later, radio, which a majority Ugandans rely on for news, lags behind other media forms in both quantity of election stories and on most measures of quality.

In terms of volume of stories, upcountry radio stations, which serve most Ugandans, carried fewer election stories compared to their counterparts in Kampala.

Dr Mwesige attributed it to, among other

THE SURVEY

- The objective of ACME's media monitoring is to contribute to accurate, fair, impartial and balanced coverage of the 2016 general election.
- ACME used content analysis, key informant interviews methods to arrive at the findings.
- ACME sampled nine newspapers, five television stations and 33 radio stations.

ers, the ownership influences, self-censorship, intimidation from the ruling party or government officials as well as low human and financial resources at most upcountry stations.

Also, most of the election coverage did not meet the standards required for