

## BONUS EPISODE: PODCASTS FOR SPARKING CONVERSATIONS ON GLOBAL HEALTH

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**Garry Aslanyan** [00:00:09] Hello and welcome to the Global Health Matters podcast. I'm your host Garry Aslanyan. If you are a regular listener, you know that we have just concluded Season 2, where we had 26 guests from 196 countries and territories on a range of issues and topics in global health. I'm very grateful to all the guests who have agreed to participate and joined me in discussing these fascinating topics. And I'm also grateful to you, our listeners, for your ongoing support. The three most listened to episodes of this season were: Global health career paths with Stephanie Topp and Renzo Guinto; The promise and perils of future health technology with Tim Mackey and Yara Aboelwaffa; and Science and diplomacy with Ilona Kickbusch and Aída Mencía Ripley. We are very pleased that, due to your support and interest, the podcast will have its third season. While I'm working with our team producing the first episode of this season, we wanted to bring you a bonus episode. Recently, some fellow podcasters and I hosted a Twitter Space, a conversation on Twitter, on podcasts for global health discourse. This bonus episode is a shortened version of that conversation. I'm convinced you'll find it useful and I hope you enjoy it.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:01:43] Hello, everyone. Welcome to this Twitter Space. We're going to have a very exciting discussion, I hope, because global health is very multifaceted and includes a lot of partners in the whole endeavour of global health, and the discourse, discussions and negotiations around global health take place at various fora, at various levels globally. Today we will focus on the topic of podcasts and their enabling role in shaping global discussion and discourse about global health. Early on when we started doing our podcast, we made a special effort to ensure that our podcast will engage individuals and stakeholders who work in global health and break silos. Hence, this Twitter Space is one of the ways we continue doing so. We hope you will be engaging in the discussion and this will be exciting conversations for all of us. I have several guests today who will contribute to the discussion. First is Mark Goldberg, who is the host of the UN Dispatches podcast.

**Mark Goldberg** [00:03:04] Thank you, I'm here. The podcast is called Global Dispatches podcast and my website is called UN Dispatch, for which I am the editor.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:03:12] Thank you. Our second guest is Priti Patnaik. Priti is the editor of Geneva Health Files.

**Priti Patnaik** [00:03:20] Hi! Thanks Garry. I'm Priti Patnaik, the founding editor of Geneva Health Files, which is a weekly investigative newsletter on global health from Geneva. Thanks so much.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:03:31] Great. Welcome. Then I have Leshawn Benedict and Gordon Thane, who are the hosts of the Public Health Insight podcast.

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:03:41] Hey everyone. My name is Leshawn Benedict and I'm here from the Public Health Insight podcast alongside Gordon.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:03:46] Last but not least is Emmanuella Amoako, who is co-host of the Global Health Unfiltered podcast.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:03:55] We will have a round of questions with our guests for the first half or about 40 minutes of the Twitter Space, and we will then turn to your comments or questions. So we are going to get started with the first question that I'm going to start with Priti. Priti, what's the gaps and opportunities for communication tools such as podcasts in global health?

**Priti Patnaik** [00:04:19] Thanks, Garry. In preparation for this hour, I actually looked up the different global health podcasts that have come on the horizon over the last couple of months, let's say, and I was surprised to find nearly 30 different global health podcasts. And I remember from two years ago when I was looking at this space, there weren't as many. It's a testimony to the interest in the field. But what I think is, this space basically reflects the way global health has evolved and is structured; meaning that I do think in some sense this is limited by the silos in the way global health is governed and the way we understand. So I do think that there is space to look at global health more broadly and to really also talk to people outside of global health. You do want this to be sort of an echo chamber where we are talking amongst ourselves, but it is also important to get voices from outside.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:05:17] Thanks for that reflection. And clearly the number of podcasts focusing in one way or the other on global health has gone up, which is welcome news, and having voices from various parts clearly is important. And we don't want to create another echo chamber by podcasts because we're trying to contribute to the reduction of echo chambers when it comes to global health. Other guests, on this point in terms of opportunities for using podcasts as a tool. Any of you who are our guests?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:05:56] Global Dispatches is not a global health podcast. It's a global affairs podcast, one topic of which we frequently cover is global health. So that's one way I tried to personally break out of the siloing that Priti referenced earlier. So with Global Dispatches in general, our core audience are people who are foreign policy professionals in one way or another; they work in government at the UN, think tanks and journalism, in diplomatic circles. That's the kind of core audience that we serve, and we try to provide a value to them. We try to serve them with in-depth conversations twice a week, every week, around an interview with an expert on some topic in foreign affairs or foreign policy or sustainable development to try to both broaden their horizons and also add value and help them with their daily work. So, for example, the episode that we just published today is about the global successful effort towards the eradication of Guinea worm disease, a very sort of niche issue in global health, but we approach that issue in a way that we seek not to speak exclusively to other global health practitioners, but rather approach that conversation about the global eradication of Guinea worm in a way that will appeal to a broader audience of foreign policy professionals. So it's just editorial decisions, I think, that make the biggest difference in how you seek to add value to your audience.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:07:40] And do you hear from your audience sometimes on even the kind of a niche topics, what they learn or what they find through this tool that they don't find in other places?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:07:54] Yeah, I mean, it's a depth that you're able to get to when you conduct, say, in my case, a 30 minute interview, as opposed to firing off like a couple of tweets. Like you can tweet out that there are only 13 Guinea worm disease cases around the world recorded in 2022, but you lack the nuance and depth and context for understanding how we got there. And that's what I seek to do with these in-depth interviews that, again, are not narrow casted, they're intended to bring what's unique and important about that niche subfield of neglected tropical diseases and bring it to a level that the broader foreign policy international affairs community would find valuable and insightful.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:08:44] And that's really in line with overall podcasts. In general, people find a way to go beyond that short snippet of information or a tweet. Thanks for that, Mark. Maybe I can turn to Leshawn and to Gordon. Maybe you guys can share with us your lessons in your journey of podcasting.

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:09:10] So with the Public Health Insight podcast, we cover a range of public health and global health topics. We talk about mental health, child maternal health, neglected tropical diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, and you would think that, you know, with an audience with such diverse interests, we have individuals from over 180 countries listening to our podcast in over 4000 cities, that's a large audience from many different regions around the world. So when we're talking about effective communication tools, these are some of the factors we need to think. Are these tools accessible? Is podcasting accessible? Well, it depends. There's actually not a lot of information about a lot of the trends in different regions of the world. We know in North America there's a lot of people and there's an increased projection in people uptaking podcasts, which is a positive. However, the information is lesser known in other regions of the world. Is the communication tool relevant to the message that's being communicated? Do people prefer visual aids, videos, infographics? And then we talk about interactivity. When we're talking about podcasts, you might think of it as just an audio based file that people can download, listen to whenever they want, which is great, it increases the accessibility. You can listen to it while you're going to work, while you're driving a car, doing something very attention demanding. However, how do you get that interactivity piece? And that's something at the Public Health Insight podcast we've been thinking about. How to have these two way communication methods instead of just that one way communication. So that's where some of the other tools in conjunction with a podcast comes in handy. So interacting with that community through social media, through email lists, seeing what kind of feedback they want. Our podcast, and I'm sure many of the podcasts here, are influenced and directed by some of the needs wanted by our audience. So that's how we kind of go about it. So if there's a specific topic that the audience wants, we talk to them and we try to understand what specific aspects of a topic you're interested in. And through those conversations, you develop other avenues of communication tools, such as meeting. Gordon and myself, we meet one-on-one with many of the people that interact with our podcast for even more richer discussions about global health. So there's a lot of different things that can happen from doing a single podcast. When you put out a podcast, you don't know what the reach will be like, but it'll be there forever. And people can continually access that piece of knowledge that you shared, which is a huge positive.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:11:47] Okay, great. Gordon do you have anything to add from your side?

**Gordon Thane** [00:11:51] In terms of podcasting in general and the podcasting as a tool for global health discourse, I think it's important to talk about even what makes a good quality podcast. We have to remember, at its root, podcasts are accessible on platforms that people might get their music on, where people might get podcasts about other shows. So we are competing to some degree with other forms of podcasts that might cover entertainment. So any podcast that is to be effective in leading global health discourse must in of itself also be a good podcast to listen to. So some of those good qualities of a podcast, of course we want what we're listening to be engaging through some good storytelling. So as hosts of podcasts, a lot of work has to be put into dissecting sometimes very complicated and complex topics and make them accessible for the everyday listener, not just people who are already engaged in global health discourse. Because if we are to grow the field of global health, we have to bring in new listeners, so we have to make sure that we're doing a good job of host, at introducing new topics to our audience and bringing it to them in a way that they're excited to share with their friends, with their families, and maybe bringing some more people. The other part I wanted to go to is, in terms of an actual tool, there's many different ways we can talk about this, depending on who our target audience is. Target audiences for a global health podcast, I would imagine that every podcast has a following by global

health professionals. What percentage that group makes up of the listeners, that's up for debate, but to some degree you will have global health professionals listening to all public health based and global health based podcasts. So that's one target audience. Other tools that these groups get information from are more traditional tools such as webinars, seminars, conferences. But if you really compare it to things like setting aside half a day for a conference or seminar, you can listen to a podcast while you're riding your bike, washing dishes and doing chores around the house, and you can absorb information in a passive way while listening to an engaging and active conversation. So in that sense, I think there's still much more left to be discovered on how to use the podcast to advance the global health discourse.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:14:28] Thanks for that, Gordon. So these are a few things maybe some other guests can contribute to this again as well. It's this issue how you keep in touch with your audience or how you make it interactive, and also this whole issue of how it compares with other ways. And we've already alluded to that a bit, but do you have additional comments on this, Priti?

**Priti Patnaik** [00:14:56] From my own experience of publishing a weekly newsletter, I think branching out to podcasts made a lot of sense, although we've published very few episodes so far. But I think what I've heard from listeners and readers of the newsletter is that people sometimes don't have time to read 3000 words of longform legal analysis on a weekly basis, but they quickly want to come up to speed on, let's say, what happened in the last three months of the really complex negotiation. And podcasting makes this kind of complex information very digestible and absolutely people can multitask and still listen and consume information. And you never know what can sort of fire their involvement depending on what they're listening to and who they are listening to. So I do think from my personal experience, it's a great way to connect readers, and especially for those of us who inhabit different mediums, this kind of cross-fertilization between audiences and communities is natural. It is self-fulfilling in some sense. And finally, from my limited experience, I do think that audio has power to establish a connection in a way that text simply cannot.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:16:05] Thanks for that. Mark, do you want to add anything?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:16:09] I'd just say that what distinguishes podcasting is that you create a depth of connection with your audience that is so much more profound than anything else, than any other medium that I can think of that I've experienced in my 20 years as a journalist covering international affairs. And I think there are two reasons for this. The first is that there is something I think just intimate about listening to someone speak to you directly into your head, or wearing earphones, you develop just a connection with that person, with that host, and you feel like you get to know them and you are inspired to take action based on their recommendation. And I hear this and I have examples of this all the time. Compare that to more ephemeral experiences on the Internet where most of the content you're consuming on the Internet, you're clicking an article because you saw a link to it on Twitter or Facebook or whatever, you read the article and then you move on with your day. And there's just so much more deep of a connection when you are investing your time into a podcast. And I think that's really what distinguishes this medium from others on the Internet.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:17:23] Very interesting insight. Thanks for that, Mark. I'm going to go back to Emmanuella and see if she is able to speak and has a better connection. Emmanuella, share with us about your podcast and your experience.

**Emmanuella Amoako** [00:17:37] Garry, can you hear me now?

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:17:39] Yes!

**Emmanuella Amoako** [00:17:39] As Priti mentioned, it's sometimes really difficult to have someone going through papers on global health, except if it's very short and succinct, but having to discuss with people who actually practice it in various countries. As our own podcast is actually focused on what happens in the Global South and how to make things better, we have a lot of people listening. You have people commenting on Twitter. You have some interaction when you do put it up on your Twitter feed because we discuss some of the topics that would not be discussed even in papers and articles, the things that don't get out for publication. So this medium is actually very interactive.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:18:34] Emmanuella, if I could stay with you. When you mentioned that a lot of your content is focused on what's happening in the Global South, what kind of gaps or opportunities when it comes to podcasting have you observed in terms of reaching audiences? What's your experience with that, with Global Health Unfiltered.

**Emmanuella Amoako** [00:19:01] The gaps that exist? Even me just joining on and trying to speak was a bit difficult, so it means that sometimes in parts of the Global South, or let me say in my country, or in some places on the continent, that it's hard to sometimes get Internet connection. Sometimes it's quite unstable. But also, we know that data telecommunication is quite, what was the word, extensive in most countries now, and even in low- and middle-income countries, almost everybody has a smartphone and everybody has data. So the opportunities to this, you might be able to reach more people now and given that people are being exposed to new media, the podcast actually gives you the opportunity to reach out to people that are interested in global health. People that would want to listen, would sometimes not have their voices heard on global platforms. They are able to talk about what they think and explain what actually happens in the Global South.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:20:22] So there are opportunities that even with the shortcomings that podcast is a tool in a way that has a lot of potential. This is good to hear, Emmanuella. Maybe I can go back to all of you and ask one question before we open to everyone. We also learnt through our experience that podcasts, or our episodes, are sometimes used as educational material or ways to introduce a topic or area or a complex issue that different learners use or different academic institutions use. Has that been your experience and what did you learn from that?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:21:10] I'd just say that I frequently hear from university professors who assign my podcast or episodes of my podcast as part of their syllabus. And actually just yesterday I had a request I hadn't seen before from a professor at the University in Maryland who reached out to me because one of her students is hearing impaired and she wanted to know if there was a transcript available to an episode that she had assigned. And so I was able to help her out with that. But that just kind of goes to show that, two things. One, that podcasts are valuable tools in the classroom or can be. And two, that accessibility is still an important feature, an aspect that we ought to be cognizant of.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:21:54] Others?

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:21:57] I would say that with the Public Health Insight podcast, like Mark mentioned, we've been reached out to by several academic institutions using our modules and podcast to teach some of their students. One specific experience was very interesting because a professor reached out to us and said that the class was so inspired by the podcast and some of the episodes that they actually created an assignment within the curriculum itself, at this Master's level programme, where they would have to make podcasts themselves. And I think that's also kind of one of the positives of having a podcast in general. Anyone can create it as long as you have an Internet access, you can be



an independent individual that creates a podcast, and that opens up the opportunity for many perspectives to be shared, which is fantastic.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:22:47] Yes, that's an interesting observation. I have heard of some educational programmes asking for learners or students to actually produce a podcast as an assignment. That's a very interesting insight. Looking at our audience and see if any of you want to ask a question or engage in the discussion. We can spend the rest of this Twitter Space talking to you. If you're joining us, we are talking about global health podcasts and their role in global health discourse. And I have terrific guests today that are contributing to the discussion. So if you'd like to request to speak and we'll give you the floor. We have Tim France who can speak, please. Hi, Tim.

**Tim France** [00:23:39] It's not a question, it's just a general point, and I think it's worth just pausing for a moment to kind of think about how other podcasts and the whole kind of podcast format has developed. And I don't know about you, but I listen to lots of different types of podcasts and when I listen to global health podcasts, we tend to use the same kind of format and I think we could borrow from some of the more, whether it's investigative approaches, or? There's such a range of formats, many of which I know require a lot of upfront preparation, but I think there is real potential to bridge some of the gaps in the silos between global health specialists and others, but as global health organizations or people interested in global health to bridge that gap, we've really got to put the investment into repackaging some of the content in a way that makes it more interesting for non-global health listeners. I end up listening to some podcasts which are quite...; there in subjects that I would never really be interested in nor listen to, and yet if they're packaged well, if they're formatted well, if it's not just an interview, but the analysis and the research and the review background is done before, then it really makes a new subject very accessible. And I think that's what we need to look at if we want to bring in people from outside of global health, which I think is one of the real potentials that we haven't explored yet. Is there?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:25:25] I'll just push back against that, Tim. That's great, but those kinds of richly reported, compelling narratives with beautiful audio, that's really expensive to produce, and I think most global health focused podcasts operate kind of on a shoestring. And you have these beautiful true crime podcasts or other podcasts on other subjects that are commercial enterprises that have like investment and are able to sustain that kind of production expense because they appeal to a popular audience. The challenge is creating that kind of content is, I think, far too expensive, frankly, for small non-profit podcasts that focus on public health.

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:26:16] If I could jump in. Thanks for sharing that. I think Mark also has a valid point. There are true resource constraints that are barriers to having a fantastically produced podcast, but in terms of, from my perspective, so our podcast is called Public Health Insight podcast, we've done almost 170 episodes now and we have been evolving in the way we have conversations and I think that's probably the most economically friendly way to evolve your podcast and make it more engaging. And you raise a point which aligns with what I said earlier: how do we have our podcast reach a bigger audience than the echo chamber of global health practitioners? And one of the ways to do that is to engage in different kinds of storytelling that are maybe less cost prohibitive. And I think that's probably where you were getting at. You're probably listening to five different global health podcasts. You might notice that the conversations maybe are too similar for your liking. So it's up to us as hosts to even meet our listeners where they're at. So for an example, one thing we started to do at Public Health Insight for our podcast is to - people are very engaged with platforms like Netflix watching different documentaries and movies, how do we speak about global health through the lens of those movies and bring in a different kind of audience? So getting more diverse types of content, talking about things that are in a

little bit different way, attaching it to things that are a little bit more popular to bring in a different audience. And I think that's a good place to start, even for people here who might be thinking about starting a podcast, think about those ways that you can differentiate yourself from the podcasts that already exist in the space and what kinds of audiences that you'd like to bring in and engage in the global health discourse.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:28:18] So great. I think this is a very interesting discussion and some valid points for both sides. I mean, obviously, it's clear that we can innovate, it's just how and what are the impact or opportunity costs of that as well. But thanks for the interesting discussion on that. I have one more listener, Mirgissa, if you'd like, you can speak now.

**Mirgissa** [00:28:44] Thank you so much for organizing this very interesting discussion, listening to all the speakers. So I was just wondering how podcasts can basically contribute to public research, other than actually discussing global health. I can basically sense what it means from the different speakers, but I just want to hear if there are experiences already in place where podcasts was or have been used for research activities, be it in global health or public health in particular. Thank you so much. I'm from Ethiopia.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:29:31] Thanks for that Mirgissa. Any of our guests have a reflection on this question?

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:29:38] Yeah, I would say that we have had researchers from different academic institutions and organizations come in to speak about the research that they have been conducting, sharing results and disseminating that information with our audience in a more general sense. But I think that there is also a lot of work to be done in the podcasting space, specifically public health / global health podcasting space, to show in an evidence based way that podcasting is an effective way to get information out there. One of the things that we did at Public Health Insight last year was we published a paper on our podcast in the Global Health Annual Review called Podcasting as a tool for health communication, and in that paper we basically shared a lot of our reach, our data, the different aspects of our podcast to kind of give a sense of what kind of potential podcasts in the global health / public health space has to disseminate research, to disseminate findings, to have these discussions that will benefit a larger audience. So I think there's much more work to be done, in an evidence based way, to show that these are effective tools.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:30:52] Thank you for that, Leshawn. We've been joined by our guests who are Mark Goldberg, the host of Global Dispatches podcast, Priti Patnaik, founding editor of Geneva Health Files, Leshawn Benedict and Gordon Thane, hosts of the Public Health Insight podcast, and Emmanuella Amoako, who is co-host of the Global Health Unfiltered podcast. In the next three minutes. I'm going to ask our guests to share a parting word that, based on this discussion, on the role that podcast plays in global health in a very short, succinct manner and we'll then close. Mark?

**Mark Goldberg** [00:31:38] I want to thank everyone for being here. I'm really looking forward to listening to the other podcasts represented by the other speakers here and also just be cognizant of the fact that podcasts can indeed be a useful tool to advance discussions and debates on global health by targeting the kind of policy-makers who are able to actually physically advance those questions and debates. So focus on your audience. Thanks.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:32:10] Thank you. Priti?

**Priti Patnaik** [00:32:12] I just wanted to actually come back on the points raised by Tim. I think it's useful. These kind of spaces are useful precisely because we hear from listeners and readers and so on. That's well taken. I think we need to, to the extent possible, pay attention to what readers want and what listeners want. And we live in an age where we are really determined by the demand. I think it makes sense to at least try to understand what readers want. If they really want in-depth podcasts, maybe there should be efforts in that direction to the extent possible. Thanks.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:32:46] Thank you, Leshawn and Gordon.

**Leshawn Benedict** [00:32:49] Thank you everyone for listening and joining us here today for this discussion on how podcasts can contribute to enabling discourse in global health. And like I said, public health / global health have a bunch of different tools and communication styles and strategies, and I think there is something to say about using a multi-pronged approach towards sharing information, listening to people and having that two way communication. So there's no magic bullet, but podcasting is definitely a way that can reach certain people where they're at in conjunction with other tools. I'll pass it over to Gordon.

**Gordon Thane** [00:33:28] Thanks Leshawn. One thing which is perhaps more in each of our individual controls as we sit here is to be an ally for folks in those countries that are looking to create change to having those global health discourses, and one of the solutions to that is to support capacity building.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:33:47] Thank you very much, that's great. And Emmanuella.

**Emmanuella Amoako** [00:33:52] Thank you very much, Garry. I think podcasts a great way to go to get people listening because, I mean everyone, the target audience most of the time is on the go and sometimes just listening in rather than reading papers and not being able to interact with whoever wrote it can be difficult. So podcasts should be a way of the future to discuss global health. Thank you.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:34:20] Thank you. I've learned definitely a lot of things, so I hope all of our listeners who have joined learned as well. We will close now. I thank you for your participation and for your presence, and thanks to our guests and please look into these podcasts, your new podcast listening and/or consider having yours. And keep in touch.

[00:34:48] Applause.

**Garry Aslanyan** [00:34:48] I invite you to join us for Season 3 of the Global Health Matters podcast, launching in early May. The first episode will have an historical reflection on global health, in particular that of the World Health Organization. Don't forget to get in touch with us via social media, email or by sharing a voice message with your reflections on the podcast.

**Elisabetta Dessi** [00:35:20] Global Health Matters is produced by TDR, an infectious diseases research programme based at the World Health Organization. Garry Aslanyan, Lindi Van Niekerk and Maki Kitamura are the content producers, and Obadiah George is the technical producer. This podcast was also made possible with the support of Chris Coze, Elisabetta Dessi, Izabela Suder-Dayao, Noreen O'Gallagher and Chembe Collaborative. The goal of Global Health Matters is to provide a forum for sharing perspectives on key issues affecting global health research. Send us your comments and suggestions by email or voice. Message to [TDRpod@who.int](mailto:TDRpod@who.int), and be sure to download and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you for listening.