



Media News
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1 Journalism is about more than just creating awareness'

Partner profile: 10 years NSJ

by Barbara Bosma

Whether they report on a corruption scandal or a soccer match, journalists in southern Africa have got a vital part to play. Their work, in the view of the Southern Africa Media Trust (NSJ), should support democratisation. Since its inception, ten years ago, NSJ has trained no less than two thousand journalists.



*R. Antwi
foto: R. de
Vires*

The spot where Carlos Cardoso, Mozambique's best known journalist, died three years ago is only three blocks away from the NSJ Maputo head office. Cardoso was shot and killed because he knew too much about corruptive practices of high-placed persons.

Today a memorial stands on the spot, serving as a lasting reminder for all to work for the democratic development of southern Africa. NSJ wants to pull its weight boosting the professionalism and expertise of media practitioners.

Africanisation

NSJ, set up ten years ago after the demise of apartheid, joined SADC and Scandinavian countries in an organisation with a predominantly Western board. Soon, however, NSJ wanted to 'Africanize'. Journalists from a number of countries in the region took charge of the co-ordination; most have continued working for NSJ to this day.

In 2001 NSJ was officially transformed into a trust, owned by regional media organisations including the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) and the Southern African Broadcasters Association (SABA).

While the original emphasis was on basic education, the organisation soon moved over to training journalists in the middle of their careers. 'Journalists often pick up the basic principles as they go along. What they actually need is short, more specific training courses which they can attend in the course of their careers,' said training manager Ransford Antwi.

Today NSJ has become a household word among journalists in southern Africa. Enrolments for the courses by far surpass the maximum number of participants. In 2002 NSJ held 46 courses, attended by 276 journalists. NSJ not only offers training courses; it can also be hired for workshops, media consultancy and the development of training materials. Among NSJ's publications in 2001 was the *Gender Sensitive Reporting Manual*, commissioned by UNESCO.

NSJ wants to adopt a most flexible attitude as a training institute. Rather than maintaining a permanent office fitted with classrooms it has a small permanent staff and a database of trainers that seek out their target group throughout the region.

Subjects range from investigative reporting to gender – and sports: ‘Sports unite people and contribute to a shared national spirit,’ said the director of NSJ, John Mukela. ‘Besides, people are lured into watching the T.V. news or buying a newspaper for the sports section.’

Sensitive reporting

NSJ has also developed a special training on ‘Reporting about HIV’, in which trainers pay due attention to the taboos associated with the disease, to the question of how to interview people with HIV, and to privacy. Antwi: ‘Journalism is about more than just creating awareness. It is also about changing one’s attitudes and behaviour.’

With all this NSJ sets great store by the ethical implications of reporting. ‘Journalists should achieve the right balance between their having to provide factual information and the way they present their reports. We help them to develop a certain sensitivity in this respect.’

Reporting can only be done if based on a genuine knowledge of the facts. That is why NSJ wants to start a collaboration with an international medical organisation in its training activities.

Media a luxury

NSJ is also firmly advocating training certificates. It wants to reward journalists who have successfully completed a number of training modules with a diploma. Talks are under way with universities in various countries on the international recognition of the documents.

The main challenge facing NSJ is how to obtain sufficient income from various sources. The organisation wants to increasingly promote itself as an institute that can be hired for specific assignments, and at the same time look for additional funds. Only this will enable it to continue its programme of training courses which journalists can afford. In Africa it remains difficult to obtain support for media development from governments. Governments are disinclined to invest in it; some consider strong media a threat, others simply don’t recognise their importance.

‘To them communication is a luxury, something that they would cut down on first. Strong media are an indispensable precondition, however, if we want to build up a *civil society* and, with it, democracy. Media give people a voice and put groups in motion,’ according to the NSJ director. For southern African media the activities of NSJ are a dire necessity, and absolutely no luxury as yet.

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<http://www.nsjtraining.org>

2 Southern Africa connected to the World Wide Web

Blessing or Curse?

by Bertil van Vugt

Internet: curse or blessing? This was the question highlighted in a debate on the role of the Internet in southern Africa, held in Felix Meritis, Amsterdam, on 26 September 2003 as part of NiZA's *Living Yearbook*



***Southern Africa.* For lack of disagreement among the speakers a sparkling debate failed to arise. Most speakers considered the Internet a potential blessing which, however, required infrastructural improvements as well as the removal of social and cultural obstacles.**

The forthcoming UN-organised World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva occasioned the discussion. Four participants were from southern Africa; three of them – Margret Mpolokoso of Zambia's Radio Icengelo, Clara Masinga, who lives in a Limpopo Province rural community in South Africa, and the Johannesburg-based media expert, Tracey Naughton – had just arrived from Geneva, where they had participated in a WSIS preparatory meeting. The other two participants were Chris Armstrong (South Africa's National Community Radio Forum) and Leo Van Audenhoven, who teaches International Communication at the Free University of Brussels.

Prior to the Living Yearbook seven delegates from southern Africa had spent a fortnight in Switzerland to attend the final WSIS preparatory meetings. Their aim was to promote the interests of rural communities in southern Africa. According to Clara Masinga, it is of crucial importance to these communities to have access to the information and communication opportunities the Internet offers.

The WSIS will be divided into two sessions, one in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, and one in Tunis in November 2005. They will bring together all United Nations Member States in a discussion on how to proceed towards the nascent information society.

Under a tree

Agreement existed between participants in the Felix Meritis debate that the Internet might lead to considerable change in southern Africa. It soon appeared, however, that we will have a long way to go yet. Tracey Naughton said that during the preparations to the WSIS she had met with too many people who paid attention to the technical part of the story only. In her introduction to the debate she said, "If we want to build an information society, we will need more than technicians only. I feel it to be my duty to

develop a vision of the future in this regard, since the development towards the digital age is primarily a socio-cultural matter.”

Yet the infrastructural element is also essential to the digital revolution, as was clearly illustrated by Margret Mpolokoso’s slide presentation on a teacher in Namibia giving classes under a tree. His bush hamlet had neither electricity nor water supply nor any means of communication with the outside world, the nearest telephone being 100 kilometres away.

The Internet has not yet stretched out its tentacles into these parts of the world, simply because governments and businesses are hardly interested in installing pricey cable networks in poor, sparsely populated areas. Clara Masinga from South Africa said it was primarily the duty of the government to invest in ICT, in order to allow not just the cities but also the rural areas to get connected to current developments.

Cable networks

Asked whether the Internet made any sense in countries where most people have no command of the English language and struggle to survive on less than US\$ 1 per day, Leo Van Audenhoven replied that opportunities abound, although at present the Web has little to offer in terms of relevant content. “We tend to regard the Internet as an inexhaustible source of knowledge, but the information on the Web mainly emanates from Western sources and is often of little use to people in rural communities in Africa.”

What then would one expect people in southern Africa to actually use the Internet for? The speakers weren’t able to think of any possible uses beyond e-trading, or comparing the prices of their own and other products such as cotton.

Poignantly, the two women participating in the panel as grassroots representatives of their communities in Zambia and South Africa were allowed to give short presentations of examples based on their own practical experience but were effectively ignored during the discussion which followed.

This contributed to the feeling of disappointment ensuing from a debate, which could have yielded so much more. The chairman of the panel, Awil Abdullah Mohamoud from Ethiopia, may be to blame for this. He strictly held the speakers to their allotted speaking time, preventing them from proceeding beyond a rather dull presentation of views that were so close to each other as to block the arising of a real debate.

More information:

www.wsis-cs.org/africa/

The Dutch free-lance journalist, Bertil van Vugt, bertilvanvugt@hotmail.com has spent, via NiZA’s Media Programme, the first six months of 2003 in Cape Town. He has written for the Cape Argus and Cape Times and has been working for a news site on positive developments in South Africa: www.come2capetown.com

3 “Fighting against AIDS is fighting against bureaucracy”

Steps for the Future

by Marieke van Twillert

***‘Actually, life is a beautiful thing’.* This is the motto of South African filmmaker Don Edkins, initiator of *Steps for the Future*, a large collection of video films on HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. Last September Edkins was NiZA’s guest at the Living Yearbook in Amsterdam, where he showed excerpts from a number of Steps films.**



D.Edkins

foto: Tom van der Ley

Edkins and his Finnish colleague, Iikka Vehkalahti, set up Steps for the Future in South Africa two years ago. STEPS is an acronym for ‘Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects’, which shows that this isn’t just a non-committal project: “We wanted to get a discussion started.”

So they did, with apparent success. The collection of documentaries and short films is now known worldwide. The films have been screened in 110 festivals and broadcasted in many countries.

More importantly, the films have had a considerable impact within southern Africa itself. In all countries of the region they are being used in AIDS education. Weekly broadcasts by the South African T.V. attracted 800,000 viewers. Edkins: “These are high ratings!”

Mobile cinema

The list of locations where the films can have a première screening remains endless. In Mozambican cinemas Steps films are shown together with international films. In areas where no screens are available a van is used as a mobile cinema.

“A mobile cinema has for instance toured Lesotho, accompanied by a number of leading actors. HIV positive actors, that is,” Edkins added. “The result is always exciting meetings. Almost everywhere the public say, You are the first HIV-infected person that I have ever met. Which is nonsense, of course, but it shows to what extent the issue is still heavily laden with taboo. It remains hard to find a person who is willing to say in public that he or she is infected with the virus.”

Screenings are always followed by a discussion with the audience, led by AIDS educators, called facilitators. “We closely co-operate with local groups.” Yet the films are anything but moralising. “We don’t want them to be. It is the stories that are important,” Edkins emphasised. “The intention is to provoke a discussion. The showing of a film in which HIV and AIDS play a role works as a starting-point for a discussion on the issue.”

A life of its own

Audiences react most strongly to films that are made by their own compatriots. “They sympathise more strongly with stories in a setting familiar to them, with heroes that speak their own language.” Edkins emphasised that the films have also been translated into at least 13 languages and dubbed. “We wanted films from different countries. And we have sought to invite filmmakers of both sexes.”

NiZA has funded an assessment of the impact of the Steps method. What is the impact of the films in Edkins’s own view? “They set off a chain reaction. Children, for instance township kids in Alexandra, watch the film at school and tell their parents about it.” And that is how it should be, according to him: “It is important that it is going to take on a life of its own.”

The government is very much involved on a local level, Edkins stated. “On a higher level the government adopt a neutral attitude. They don’t throw any obstacles in our way, yet they refuse to fund the project.” Steps, therefore, works primarily with local groups and international donors.

“We are doing everything to extend the range of the films. A number of units are always on the road simultaneously.” Nevertheless it takes up much time and effort to reach the public. “Contacts have been established in Botswana, while in Mozambique the first attempts to start a co-operation have been made a year and a half ago. In Namibia things have started to work out well to some extent. Local AIDS support groups are doing their utmost; the problem is rather bureaucracy, which is the greatest stumbling block to the fight against AIDS.”

Breakthrough

The 36 films were made three years ago, by well-known as well as debutant filmmakers. For some among the first-time directors their participation in the Steps project has meant their breaking through as filmmakers. The Zambian, Sampa Kangwa, is now shooting a documentary on the so-called ‘date-rape’ phenomenon.

The video films haven’t lost their topicality over the last three years; yet Edkins has moved on. “AIDS is going to stay with us. I myself don’t know of any new issues related to AIDS that would demand a new series of films. But there are new subjects. The South African Broadcasting Corporation will soon broadcast a number of films on one decade of democracy. Though they are not Steps films, they have fittingly followed the Steps concept of combining training with production and distribution”

More information:

www.steps.co.za

The films are on hire at NiZA’s information- and documentary centre BIDOC.
www.niza.nl/bidoc

4 Angolan media and civil society eye to eye

Training seminar

By Mónica Rafael and Mabel González Bustelo

Angola is presently facing a transition. Several of the issues that will be of fundamental relevance in the country's future are presently being defined and decided upon without the public opinion being aware or part of it. Last month NIZA, the Peace Research Centre (Madrid) and the Peace Studies Group (University of Coimbra) held a training seminar for journalists and NGO's officials in Luanda.

Before the challenge of reconstruction

Angola's civil society can be characterised as incipient and relatively weak. Angolan NGO's were born out of an emergency context and they struggle with lack of means and qualified human resources. They experience utter dependence from external financial resources. They are vulnerable to governmental pressures and face therefore a deficient level of articulation between themselves and with international networks. All these factors make it hard to create a civil society's "agenda" for the country's future, despite a growing level of awareness within the NGO's.

State media have until recently monopolised the information market but some independent media, such as radio and weekly newspapers, started being developed. Notwithstanding their precarious financial and human resources, associated with governmental pressures, private media have taken steps towards informative pluralism.

As a tool

The project we initiated is a media project for reconciliation and reconstruction. The aim is to strengthen the role of civil society through the use of the media as a tool for the consolidation and democratic participation of the Angolan civil society in the post-conflict long-term period.

The aim of the mission was to obtain information on the needs and situation of Angolan NGO's and media and to capacitate them in order to improve mutual relations and strengthening.

"Bringing two strangers together"

With this purpose a training seminar took place during the week 8-12 September 2003 with NGO's members and journalists. There were 26 participants in the seminar.

The methodology included a brief theoretical part to provide basic knowledge on fragile States and the international system, but it was eminently practical and participative.

The course was divided in three parts:

- Journalists. On the use of journalistic techniques and types.
Practical exercise: production of an eight-page press supplement on the theme ‘National Reconciliation’ and preparation of a 25 minute radio programme on ‘The Angolan society before the elections’.
- NGO’s members. On the importance of adequate information management and use of media to disseminate NGO’s knowledge, actions and agenda.
Practical exercise: elaboration of press notes; preparation of interviews; preparation and simulation of a radio debate on the elections.
- Journalists and NGO’s together. Evaluation of both groups’ strengths and weaknesses; present and desirable relationship; improvement and mutual reinforcement.

As a result of the course, several of the participants took part in a live debate in Radio Ecclesia at the end of the last session, with the theme “Angolan Media and Civil Society before the general elections”.

A payment relationship

Both groups started with a very negative perception of each other, which was reduced as they began debating and became aware of each other’s limitations. This led to very interesting debates, with a high level of participation and interest.



Seminar participants

One of the most positive aspects of the course identified by the participants was the opportunity to develop a dialogue between the two groups, alongside the awareness raising on the importance of co-operation between them for the national reconstruction process.

For example, there hasn’t been a defined strategy of contact between NGO’s and the media from both sides. NGO’s usually conceive contact with the media through a payment relationship – to buy radio time or a page in a weekly. On the other hand, the media see NGO’s merely as providers of services and for this reason they are not considered a priority source of information.

A negative side highlighted was the lack of time for a more profound development of the course’s themes, with particular emphasis on communication techniques and elections debate. For this reason, they unanimously demonstrated a strong interest in the realisation of future courses with participants from both sectors, where members from other civil society organisations or even members from more open political parties can be present.

Links

- Background information on failed states theory (PDF file or URL)

- Digital photo's
- Debate

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5 All Rise! THE PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE ARE STANDING TO SPEAK

by Jeanette Minnie

“The analogy is that if you were sentenced to death, you would have to hang first and then appeal to the court afterwards”. This was the response of Gugulethu Moyo, the legal advisor of the Daily News, after the High Court in Zimbabwe ruled that the newspaper could not challenge the constitutional validity of one of its notorious media laws, before obeying the law first.

The court decided that the Daily News first had to apply to the State for a licence to publish, before it could apply to the court to object to a law that enforces state licensing of the media. After this unexpected turn of events, the Daily News had little room for manoeuvre. It applied to the State for a licence to operate -- and the State refused it.

This refusal, however, has again opened the way for the Daily News to challenge the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), albeit through a circuitous legal route. The AIPPA requires state licensing of all “mass media services” and all individual journalists by a state-appointed Media and Information Commission as a precondition of the right to publish. In the view of the Daily News these legal requirements are in breach of the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Yes, Zimbabwe was once a good country.

Conscience[

It is not only the Daily News that is fighting for survival in Zimbabwe. At this stage (October 6) 15 of its journalists have been arrested and charged separately for practising without State accreditation. The remaining 30 journalists on the newspaper are also under investigation. Beyond them, there are journalists in Zimbabwe on other independent newspapers, including some editors, who have not applied for individual accreditation with the State – as a matter of conscience.

Without accreditation, they are not allowed to practise as journalists in the country – not even in a freelance capacity. Under the AIPPA, it is now illegal in Zimbabwe to exercise your national right to freedom of expression and your right to work in your chosen profession as guaranteed in the country’s constitution.

There are a number of other notable independent (weekly) newspapers in Zimbabwe including The Standard, the Zimbabwe Independent and the Financial Gazette. As a matter of survival they applied for and received State registration, but some of their employees were either refused individual accreditation, or as a matter of conscience refused to apply for accreditation. On the Daily News, some journalists applied for accreditation, but were refused, because their newspaper was not licensed by the state.

Criminal penalties under AIPPA

Under the AIPPA it is illegal for a ‘mass media service’ to operate as an unregistered service and/or to employ unaccredited journalists. The penalty in both cases includes forfeiture of (all) the assets of that mass media service to the State, and prison sentences and fines for the respective (holding) company directors. Unaccredited journalists found working as journalists can also be imprisoned and fined.

Over the last year about 50 journalists (but also some drivers and lawyers) have been arrested in relation to media coverage of events in Zimbabwe. Most of these were Zimbabweans, but also included a number of foreign journalists including at least two Dutch journalists. Raymond Bouwman and Pim Hawinkels of RTL5 TV were arrested on 26 February this year for filming Zimbabweans queuing for bread in Bulawayo.

MISA under attack

The civil society organisations that defend and promote free, fair and independent media are now also being targeted. MISA-Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwean national chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), has been told that it too has to register as a ‘mass media service’.

Under the AIPPA, any civic organisation that publishes information in any form and distributes it to a wider readership beyond its own members falls under the definition of a ‘mass media service’.

That MISA-Zimbabwe has come into the firing line is not a surprise. It reports all the media freedom violations that occur in that country, and conducts high-profile advocacy in support of free and independent media. It has gone to court to challenge the provisions of AIPPA that define it as a ‘mass media service’. Perhaps it too will be told to hang under the law first and to complain later.

Diplomatic offensive

But MISA has also gone further. MISA-Zimbabwe and the Regional Secretariat of MISA in Namibia have gone on the diplomatic offensive. Three teams from Zimbabwe are currently travelling to other African countries where they hold press conferences, visit the governments of those countries and embassies of other African countries.

They draw attention to the media crisis in Zimbabwe. Each team consists of a representative of MISA-Zimbabwe, an editor of one of the independent newspapers and a media lawyer. They are fed up with the policy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ as led by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and practised by the 14 member governments of the Southern African Development Community and in the African Union.

They believe that the voices of the people of Zimbabwe must be heard outside of its borders, particularly in Africa, and not only the voices of the ZANU-PF government and the MDC opposition party.

All rise: The people of Zimbabwe are standing to speak!

Jeanette Minnie is an advisor to NiZA on the issue of freedom of expression. She has been a director of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), South Africa. jcmin@iafrica.com

www.misa.org; www.mmpz.org.zw

6 Community traditions in peace building

Tsikaya

by Victor Gama

The function of music as a message vehicle is ancient in Africa. The example of drums communicating from village to village in the past is one of the most known in the West. Today, the musical traditions in the rural areas are an element of unity in torn Angola. They convey messages of tolerance and represent a potential for developing a media model at grass roots level. An introduction to Tsikaya.



foto: Victor Gama

The Tsikaya project is a partnership among organisations working in the area of culture and development, human rights advocacy, civic education and media freedom in Angola. It proposes a holistic approach in the struggle for peace building against poverty and exclusion through the preservation and rehabilitation of the Angolan rural musical heritage.

Open microphone

Victor Gama initiated Tsikaya in 1997 on a field trip to Cuito-Cuanavale in the Cuando-Cubango province in Angola. The musicians who participated then, took the opportunity of Gama's open microphone and a tape recorder to send out messages to other parts of Angola, as this was the only means at that moment to do so.

One of the songs recorded is called [i]Mensagem a Luanda[/i], (Message to Luanda). The singer expresses his worries and concerns about the situation and problems afflicting his remote village and peoples, and asks for assistance from the capital city.

Tsikaya aims at opening a channel to freely express aspects of cultural identity, promote family and community traditions. It wishes to contribute to the rehabilitation and promotion of the national cultural heritage by providing the tools and mechanisms of returning that heritage to those people in the rural country.

It gives a voice to communities while stimulating productive activities in the field of sustainable cultural economies with activities such as recordings and CD sales, instruments and handcrafts building, workshops, exchanges and performances by master musicians.

The role of memory

The intention of the project is to preserve and strengthen threatened traditional musical forms. This means both instruments and musical repertoire of all kinds. By doing so, Tsikaya wants to help communities recover and interpret their cultural values, and to examine the role that memory, history and imagination play in helping communities withstand and overcome poverty, exclusion and violence.



foto: Victor Gama

Tsikaya represents a platform at grass roots level, working with culture as a means to understand and be understood and lay down the foundations for development work in the particular context of Angola.

The project brings together the main cultural actors at community level such as, the *regedor*, the *soba*, the musicians and composers. But it also involves the municipal administrator, primary school teachers, the women who co-ordinate choir groups, officials who represent the Ministry of Education. These are the very same people that form the web through which messages, communication and information flow in and out of the commune.

Women percussionists

The target group of Tsikaya are musicians, singers and composers in rural communities in the province of Benguela. These are women, men as well as children. It must be taken into consideration, though, that there are rarely any professional musicians present. Therefore most of these artists are peasants, some work for the local administration, some are traditional therapists, others deal at the local market.

The activities of music-making involve mostly the family of the composer or musician and neighbours. Women and children are often part of the choir that accompanies the musician and in many cases the composer is the lead-singer in the choir.

In Hanha do Norte we encountered a rich musical scene with several groups and many with exchanged participants like drummers or singers and dancers. Some of these groups are lead by women who create themselves the songs and dances for the group in line with ancient traditions such as those of women percussionists, for example.

Network

The implementation is based on the constitution of an interactive network. This consists of local community co-ordinators, local musicians in the rural communities, local traditional authorities like the [i]regedores[/i] and [i]sobas[/i], the co-ordinators of the cultural association Bismas in Benguela, the association's members, performing artists, radio programmers and journalists in Benguela and throughout Angola.

This network benefits greatly from linking with existing programs created and run by the Angolan NGO ADRA in the areas of civic education and civic rights advocacy and

the partnership on an international level with the cultural association PangeiArt, initiator of this project.

Victor Gama (Angola/Portugal) is a musician and composer. To date he has recorded and produced 4 CDs. He has done extensive field recordings in Angola, Namibia, Cuba, Colombia and has performed and exhibited his instruments world-wide
victorgama@pangeiart.org

More on Victor Gama at:

<http://www.themilkfactory.co.uk/main/index.php>

7 Daily News interim editor Saidi: No fear

by Nienke van Trommel

“Democracy in Zimbabwe has been dealt a heavy blow,” observed William Saidi. The *Daily News* is the country’s largest independent newspaper, and Saidi is its editor *ad interim* – or, he was. He is out of work since the police raided the newspaper’s head office in Harare and sealed the editorial office on 12 September. Nevertheless Saidi has kept his good spirits: “I am reporting the truth, and if one has nothing to hide, one has nothing to be afraid of.”



William Saidi
foto: Tom van der
Ley

In September Saidi was in the Netherlands on the invitation of NiZA. He wasn’t afraid to return to Zimbabwe: “Next week we will be in the courtroom again to contest the shutdown of our paper.”

Soviet Union

There is nothing new under the Zimbabwean sun when it comes to the maiming of independent newspapers. In 1981 Saidi worked for *The Herald*, the largest independent Zimbabwean newspaper at the time. The paper was taken over by the government. Saidi: “On day number two of the takeover I was handed a note which said that from that moment on, I was going to be pro Soviet Union and China and anti the United States and Great Britain. I threw the note away and resigned.”

“From then on I knew that president Mugabe was a bad lot. It took the world a long time, however, to realize that Robert Mugabe, rather than the big reconciler who was going to make black and white live peacefully next to each other, was a power-mad person with a total disregard of his own people.”

Saidi was involved in founding the *Daily News* in 1999. The newspaper called a spade a spade, which appealed greatly to the Zimbabweans. The paper’s daily circulation rose to 120,000 within two years of its existence. With a circulation of 60,000 the state newspaper, *The Herald*, contrasted poorly with its competitor. It has often been alleged that the *Daily News* acts as a mere club bulletin for the opposition party, the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change). “Rubbish,” Saidi protested. “The fact that we speak out critically about the government does not imply that we are the mouthpiece of the opposition.”

MDC members sometimes fail to remember, though, that the *Daily News* sets store by its independence. Saidi: “Not long ago the Deputy Minister of Education appeared in my office. This MDC man was under the impression that I would be able to write a speech for him. Gently I got him to understand that independent journalists do not write speeches for ministers and deputy ministers.”

Weapons of mass destruction

The critical stance of the *Daily News* on the new Constitution and the land redistribution issue have turned out to be nails in the newspaper's coffin. In 2000 a bomb was detonated on the floor below the head office of the *Daily News* in Harare; however, it was not powerful enough to cause any serious damage to the office. In 2001 the printing press of the *Daily News* was blown up. None of those suspected of the bomb attacks have been arrested to this day.

The grand finale was the shutdown of the *Daily News* head office on 12 September by the police. "I reckon you're looking for weapons of mass destruction?", the most junior journalist who witnessed the raid asked the morose policemen.

The reason for the police raid was that journalists at the *Daily News* had lodged a complaint against the AIPPA (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act). Journalists who apply for registration in accordance with the AIPPA tie themselves down to the rules of the game drawn up by the government, which may well interfere with the freedom of expression and the free gathering of news. Because the journalists of the *Daily News* had not registered in accordance with the AIPPA, they were operating illegally and their paper had to close down, the Zimbabwean High Court ruled.

Next victims

Saidi expected the three remaining independent Zimbabwean newspapers, *The Standard*, *The Independent* and *The Financial Gazette*, with a circulation of around 40,000 for each paper, to be the next victims of the Mugabe government.

The general elections of 2005 will change everything, however. According to Saidi the people of Zimbabwe are starving and exhausted by fear and HIV. "Everyone, supporters of Zanu-PF and MDC alike, is fed up with the situation – as we will find out at the polls in 2005."

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See also: Comment by Jeanette Minnie

New website: <http://www.daily-news.co.za/>

8 Zapiro: quiet diplomacy



Zapiro © - 22 oktober 2003