



Media News
Media Southern Africa

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1 Bicycle-powered cell phones and other media-ICT oddities

Highway Africa 2004 Conference

By Chris Armstrong

In past years, the annual Highway Africa conference in Grahamstown felt a bit like ‘Highway South Africa’, or maybe ‘Highway SADC’, or perhaps ‘Highway English-speaking Africa’. But not this year.

This year’s gathering of journalists and media-ICT experts – the 8th annual, held September 16-18, 2004 -- had a bigger-than-ever contingent of delegates from the farther reaches of sub-Saharan Africa – not just from SADC and East Africa, but also from Central and West African nations.

The chatter during the conference tea breaks, lunches and numerous sponsored booze-ups and dinners was just as likely to be in French or Swahili as it was to be in Grahamstown’s ‘mother tongue’ of English – the language of the colonial settlers who made this windy, rainy, sunny (all within the same hour) town their home in the early 19th Century.

Continentalism

Highway Africa’s growing continentalism is the result of an expanding partnership between the project’s South African hosts (Rhodes University and the South African Broadcasting Corporation) and the UN’s Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), based in Addis Ababa.

The ECA’s head of ICT (information and communication technology) programmes, Aida Opoku-Mensah, was on hand for most of the conference, and helped present the ECA’s African Information Society Initiative (AIS) Media Awards on Sept. 16th – in a joint ceremony with the Highway Africa New Media Awards, broadcast live throughout the continent on the SABC Africa TV service.

The 11 different awards, which had attracted more than 250 entries from 30 African countries, recognised innovative use of new technologies and excellence in reporting on ICT issues. The winners included entrants from Senegal, Mali, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa and Mauritius.

The awards ceremony, featuring local music, gymnastics and excited award-winners, managed to rise above the aesthetic void of the venue -- the 1820 Settler’s Monument, a place seemingly originally planned to house a human-organ-donation library or some such function.

Pedal as you go

But the real star of Highway Africa 2004 was not at the awards ceremony. He appeared the next day, in the form of 17-year-old South African Sivu Mzamo, who has developed

a bicycle-powered cell-phone charger. As Rhodes Media Studies Head Guy Berger put it, Mzamo's invention adds a "pedal as you go" dimension to cellular "pay as you go."

Mzamo, who addressed delegates with a charm and maturity well beyond his years and had a bicycle on hand to demonstrate his invention, provided a useful antidote to what is always a liability at such "ICT events" – the droning PowerPoint slides about abstract clichés such as "e-readiness" and "digital inclusion."

Fortunately, Highway Africa 2004 didn't fall into the "e-cliché" trap too often, and included some strong presentations, including:

- MultiChoice Africa's presentations on digital and interactive TV <http://www.multichoice.co.za>
- Alain Modoux's outline of the media's place in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process
- The "Creating Content" presentations by Peter Benjamin (Open Knowledge Network), Shafika Isaacs (SchoolNet Africa) <http://www.schoolnet africa.net> and Heather Ford (Creative Commons) <http://za.creativecommons.org/>
- Andrew Kanyegirire's discussion of the place of ICT in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
- Gillian Marcelle's provocative look at the success of cellular phone operator MTN in Nigeria
- Lilian Ndamang's account of the progress of Senegal's proposal for a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

One of the more interesting trends discussed was the growing use by TV viewers of cellular SMS messaging to interact with TV programming, with their messages often appearing in the "ticker tape" rolling display at the bottom of the TV screen.

The MultiChoice Africa representative referred to the appeal of this interactivity as "your 168 characters of fame" – an update of the late US pop artist Andy Warhol's notion of everyone needing "15 minutes of fame."

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2 Media and Gender Summit; Seeking the balance

Reportage

By Ellen Hollemans

Gender-related jokes were rife after two days of talking about women in the media. “I won’t sit down at this table, too many men, we need greater balance,” a journalist from Zambia muttered while his eyes roamed the restaurant looking for a table with more women.

About 180 academics, journalists, activists, politicians and NGO workers assembled in Johannesburg from 12 to 14 September to discuss the representation of women in the media. On the invitation of Gender Links and MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa) participants from eighteen countries attended a Media and Gender Summit in order to exchange experiences and set up an international network.

Gender study

The focus was on the most effective strategies to achieve greater attention for gender-related issues and enhancing the representation of women in the media. A Gender Links and MISA commissioned *Gender and Media Baseline Study* from 2003 provided the basis of almost every debate.

The study showed that, on average, women in southern Africa constitute 17 per cent of the news sources consulted and that they are often portrayed in marginal or traditional roles.

Social issues strongly affecting the lives of women seldom feature on the political agenda. The conference organisers hope to be able to change this through the media.

Gender Links has organised courses, workshops and trainings for journalists as well as politicians. The issue has meanwhile been put on the agenda by many relevant bodies.

In various countries in the region networks have been created with the aim of promoting attention to women. The media are being lobbied and, for instance, radio stations aimed especially at women have been successfully initiated.

“Seeing the energy in this room and realising what has been achieved in the past two years, I am certain that we will be able to bring about great changes in the years to come,” Gender Links manager Colleen Lowe Morna said in her encouraging inaugural address.

Echoes

Media reporting of elections in Malawi, South Africa and elsewhere shows, however, that equal representation in the media has certainly not been accomplished yet. There still is a lack of attention to women’s issues in political campaigns.

Elections are generally found to be excellent occasions to put women's issues high on the political agenda. The elections to be held in Namibia in November have prompted the Polytechnic Namibia in Windhoek to start a pilot project.

With the support of NiZA, among other organisations, students at the Media Technology department run a press agency called Echoes News Service. The aim is to bring about more democratic reporting and promote balanced reporting on gender issues.

The students operate in nine different parts of the country. A number of topics were selected after discussions with the local population, surveys and interviews. Reports on issues such as HIV/Aids, education and discrimination are offered or sold to newspapers and distributed through the national news agency.

Test

"Press reporting in Namibia is to a large extent defined by the state. The limelight is almost always on the President and the Cabinet; what is going on among the population remaining in the dark. We try to change this with this project," said Polytechnic of Namibia's Pauliina Shilongo.

"Besides studying with us, our students work already in the media, which means that the project is run by professional journalists. They have completed three years of study during which the university paid much attention to democracy and balanced reporting on gender."

"The project is also a test. What have the students learned from these theoretical courses? Do they realise that a balance should be sought between men and women as sources of news?"

Awards

At the conference awards were presented to ten journalists who had successfully and in a constructive manner addressed gender and women's issues in the media.

Lori Waselchuk from South Africa won the first prize in the photographic category with her series of pictures entitled 'From the Heart of Darkness', consisting of portraits of women who had survived the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The jury commended the point of view the photographer had chosen. "The lens of Waselchuk captures women who are victims, but also survivors. Rare images coming out of the ravages of war; images that tell the story but are emotionally engaging as well."

Ellen Hollemans is one of six recently graduated journalists who are gaining working experience in South Africa via the Media Programme of NiZA. Hollemans is currently working at Seipone Productions.

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More information:

Genderlinks <http://www.genderlinks.org.za>

Polytechnic of Namibia <http://www.polytechnic.edu.na>

3 Radio Maendeleo expands its reach in eastern Congo

Partner Profile

By Déo Namujimbo

Of the 10 radios or so broadcasting in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Radio Maendeleo is one of the few that has the full confidence of its listeners. This is no mean feat and is due to the professionalism of its journalists and other staff, its coverage of a broad variety of subjects, the 80 radio clubs that tune in regularly and technical wizardry that keeps the station on air 24/7.

Here's what a listener in Bukavu says, "Maendeleo is the only radio station that informs us objectively about what is going on in our province and our country. Their presenters and journalists really dig for information, sometimes even risking their lives."

Those living outside of the city of Bukavu also tune in and as a result, villagers are well-informed about health matters, their own agricultural work, but also human rights and politics. André Kasilunda, who lives 15 km from Bukavu, gives Meandeleo a big thumbs-up. "We love this station," he says. "Even people who cannot read and write can protect themselves against all kinds of diseases and malnutrition. They work more effectively and they have also learned how to manage a family budget. "

This is 'People's Radio'. Maendeleo broadcasts in all local languages plus French and Swahili, so everyone gets the message. And all this is done with a staff of 22: eight journalists, four technicians and ten support staff. Currently, there are also three interns and 20 volunteers.

Shut down

Director Kizito Mushizi reflects on more than a decade of Radio Maendeleo: "We started broadcasting in 1993, and thanks to the work of some local organisations and support from our German and Belgian partners we have actually managed to take off. We are proud of what we have achieved. But we do face major problems that threaten our independence."

Maendeleo has in fact been shut down twice by the rebel group RCD (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie), first for two years and more recently for six months. The station's director and head of programmes, Jean Omba Kamengele, have been frequently threatened and arrested. Despite these attacks, Maendeleo's journalists and staff have soldiered on, maintaining the radio clubs and continuing to gather material for its sound archives.

"Actually the broadcast were shut down, but not our offices", adds the director. "So journalists went on working and gathered stories and sound to fill our database with reports on current events. They were working as volunteers since, due to the situation their job contracts had been suspended, so they could not get salaries."

5000 Watts

Following the 2002 peace accords, there is a new political landscape emerging in the DRC and communication is a key player in the field. However, this requires a clear structure, as Sosthène Bulambo wa Tombo, president of the board of governors at Maendeleo, explains. “We can only continue this work when we are part of a well-organised wider body”.

This is why we are setting up and maintaining a media network in eastern Congo (Rateco) and we are part of a national association of local radio stations (Arco). We have participated in a national media congress which led to the birth of the National Congolese Press Union and a self-regulatory body for our media. So that’s our contribution to a diverse media landscape in our country.”

Emmanuel Basema Muluke, the station’s head technician, must be the happiest man on earth, judging by his smile. And he is. “We are planning to mount a new transmitter, 5000 Watts strong. And a new FM transmitter too. This means that our reach will be five time larger than today. Now, we only reach people who live within 150 kilometres of Bukavu.” If the security situation permits, Radio Maendeleo is going to use its new-found broadcasting power to become an important voice in the run up to the forthcoming elections. Let’s hope so.

Déo Namujimbo is a freelance journalist in DRC. He coordinates the SYFIA agency in East Congo (<http://www.syfia.info/fr/index.asp>) en is a correspondent for the Panos Institute (http://www.panosparis.org/gb/plura_afriqcentral.php) and Journalistes en danger (<http://www.jed-congo.org>).

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Radio Maendeleo is a partner organisation of NiZA since 2002

4 Brand atheists, beer and white guilt

Comment

By Jeanette Minnie

In their own words as recorded in the courts recently, Justin Nurse and five of his friends are “conscientious objectors to mass-market mediocrity” who grew up “to be brand atheists”. Last month a South African court ruled that their company, Laugh it Off Promotions, could not sell T-shirts that parody the Carling Black Label trademark of South African Breweries (SAB).

The South African media have roundly and correctly condemned the ruling. “Last week saw a giant leap forward for corporate hegemony along with an equally giant leap backwards for freedom of speech”, the Mail & Guardian wrote.

T-shirts

The copyrighted SAB trademark and advertising slogan – aimed at black working class men in South Africa. - says: “Black Label Carling : Africa’s lively lusty beer since 1952”. Nurse and his friends reproduced the trade mark on a T-shirt but changed the words to say: “ Black Labour, White Guilt: Africa’s lusty, lively exploitation since 1652. No regard given worldwide”. According to the Sunday Times, Nurse calls it ‘ideological jiu-jitsu’ in which the weight of a brand is used against itself.

SAB is a huge beer company and monopoly in South Africa. It also brews and sells beer in many other African countries – virtually all over the continent. It bought the giant Miller’s brewing company in the USA last year. SAB has been roundly condemned for what many see as heavy-handed corporate action against a small group of activists, who at best sold only a few hundred of these T-shirts.

Media commentaries and headlines about the court action and the decision to grant an interdict against the sale of the T-shirts said that “while the beer may be lusty and lively, the company’s bitter froth tasted humourless and bullying”, “Too afraid to leave the laagers” and “Another triumph for the corporate bully boys”.

Humour

The court essentially ruled that the activists were free to express their opinions, but not by doing it for gain - using other people’s trademarks. But as a columnist of the Sunday Times - Carmel Rickard - pointed out, a medium has been censored here. In order “to reach a particular audience, one uses the appropriate vehicle to reach that audience. That’s what popular culture is all about. Ban the manner and you effectively ban the message”.

One of the supreme ironies in this case is that SAB recently agreed to sponsor the newly created "SAB Chair of Media and Democracy" at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape. Further to the list of accusations so far recorded against SAB in the

media (corporate bully, no sense of humour, oppressor of free speech) this author would now also like to add the charge of 'hypocrite'.

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5 African investigative journalists join forces

Launch

By Evelyn Groenink

Investigative journalists in eight African countries are now in constant touch with one another through a website run by FAIR: the Forum for African Investigative Reporters. The site (www.fairreporters.org) has several functions, the most important one being the linking of journalists.

“We all need to connect to colleagues in other parts of Africa, firstly because the things we investigate, like corruption and embezzlement, are so similar. You find you are investigating the same international connections as a colleague in another country, and you embark on a cross-border partnership”, says FAIR management committee member Mpho Moagi, a producer for the South African investigative TV programme ‘Special Assignment’.

“The site and the network become an outlet for local stuff you discover, and the stories grow bigger.” With this site, FAIR has created, in Moagi’s words, a “hub of investigative journalism”, which enables professional investigative journalists to become part of a ‘wavelength of information’.

The site contains a number of informative databases and research tools, as well as a searchable archive containing the pan-African investigative electronic newsletter the Forum has been publishing now for almost a year. The newsletter reports on, and carries live links to, all ongoing investigations, and suspicious activities -such as arms trade and resource exploitation- in Africa, about which anything has been published on the internet.

Colleague-to-colleague

“A main function of FAIR is to extend the information resources which we need for our stories. But it is not the sole function of the FAIR site”, says Moagi. “It is also very important that colleagues can connect to each other professionally. We want to help one another to increase our skills and to raise the level of investigative journalism throughout Africa.”

“However”, adds Moagi, “we don’t want to be a mere ‘help’ facility either. We need to inspire one another, learn from one another and work hard to create more good quality journalism. There is a lack of colleague-to-colleague feedback and mentoring. Usually, as a journalist you only get responded to by your audience or readership. Not by fellow professionals. The site will change that. The Internet is great for that purpose -who has the luxury of attending conferences all the time?”

Because FAIR can only work as a professional network if it consists of professionals, a journalist can only join FAIR when he or she has proven to be a serious investigative journalist. Aspiring members have to submit at least two stories showing basic research

skills and a good ethical approach before they are accepted: ‘gossip’ or mere ‘activism’ stories will not help to get closer to membership.

Wavelength

Once accepted, and (for a fee of only USD 25,- per year) given access to the site resources, however, the rewards are great. Besides the aforementioned information ‘wavelength’, network support and databases, there are also chapters on research tools (search engines and other useful web facilities), model contracts, ethical and “best practice” codes as well as a weekly news update and archive of training and sponsorship facilities.

Chapters on legal assistance (vital in a continent where, at any given time, several journalists find themselves in jail for ‘defamation’ and ‘publication of confidential documents’) and ‘home-made’ FAIR training programmes are still in the pipeline.

“The training chapter will be useful to and accessible for aspiring FAIR members, who don’t yet qualify for full professional FAIR membership”, says Moagi. “We don’t only want to raise the quality of African investigative journalism, we also need to grow the profession. We need more investigative journalists and that means we must also create incentives and opportunities for people to become investigative journalists, especially in areas, such as the rural areas, where there are practically no journalists, let alone investigative ones, at present.”

Joint investigation

The Forum for African Investigative Reporters was originally founded at a workshop at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in Johannesburg, South Africa, in May 2003. Moagi was one of the founders, together with other respected “IJ”s” such as Benjamin Thompson of The Guardian in Tanzania, Christof Maletsky of The Namibian in Namibia, and Justin Arenstein of African Eye News Service, a pan-African news network based in Mpumalanga, South Africa, (near the Mozambican border).

Since the foundation, journalists from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Ghana have joined the network. It is however only now, after much designing of chapters and adding functions, that the website is nearing completion. The Forum is particularly grateful to the IAJ, which spearheaded its foundation and ‘adopted’ the website idea, as well as to NiZa, which provided the funding to realize the website.

The site was officially launched at last months Highway Africa conference at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, where it was nominated for one of the conference’s yearly new media awards. FAIR members hosted an investigative journalism workshop at the conference as well.

Later in the year, FAIR will link up with the African Economic Editors Conference, also to be held in South Africa, where it will launch its first full-network, all-African, joint investigation into the financial backers behind today's most powerful African leaders.

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6 ICT's for Democracy en Techno-Hype or Info-Hope?

Nieuwe publicaties van Chris Armstrong

In opdracht van het Mediaprogramma van het Nederlands instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika (NiZA) heeft Chris Armstrong twee projecten in de Angolese media- en communicatiesector onder de loep genomen. Daarnaast schreef hij een leesbaar verslag over de World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

De burgeroorlog in Angola duurde van 1975 tot 2002 – zeventwintig jaren die een land rijk aan bodemschatten gemaakt hebben tot een van de armste landen van Afrika.

Bij het voortschrijden van de wederopbouw is een belangrijke rol weggelegd voor media- en communicatieprojecten. Maar in een land waar in 1992 voor het laatst verkiezingen werden gehouden en waar het samenspel van olie, diamanten en gevestigde belangen een doorzichtig en verantwoordelijk bestuur danig in de weg kan zitten, valt het werk aan de communicatie niet mee.

Chris Armstrong bekijkt in *ICT's for Democracy: Media and the post-war reconstruction of Angola* twee projecten in de Angolese media- en communicatiesector. Hij bespreekt het gebruik door Rádio Ecclésia in Luanda van de nieuwste technologie, nu deze zender bezig is over te gaan op het landelijk uitzenden van zijn dynamische en onafhankelijke programma's. En hij doet verslag van het ANGONET Wireless Internet Access Project in Huambo, dat voor een door de jarenlange oorlog afgezonderd gebleven regio de hoop vormt op toegang tot geavanceerde en toch niet te kostbare vormen van communicatie.

Op basis van zijn onderzoek naar de politieke, materiële en praktische uitdagingen waar diegenen voor staan die open en onafhankelijke informatie willen inzetten als middel voor de opbouw van een nieuw Angola, beoordeelt Armstrong het potentieel van deze projecten, niet alleen in technologisch opzicht, maar ook in menselijk opzicht en wat de maatschappij betreft aan de vorming waarvan mensen een bijdrage leveren of hopen te leveren.

Techno-Hype or Info-Hope? - Southern African Civil Society Tackles the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

De World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, uitgesproken 'wussis') is een top in twee delen, waarvan het eerste in december 2003 werd gehouden in Genève en het tweede deel gepland staat voor november 2005 in Tunis. De top is bijeengeroepen door de International Telecommunication Union (ITU), een van de oudste en minst doorzichtige VN-lichamen.

Dit rapport beschrijft de activiteiten van de partners van het Mediaprogramma van het Nederlands instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika (NiZA) en hun collega-instellingen in de

civil society van de landen van SADC (de Southern African Development Community) in de aanloop tot en tijdens het eerste Geneefse onderdeel van WSIS.

ICT's for Democracy (€ 9,00) en *Techno-Hype or Info-Hope?*(€ 5,00) zijn te bestellen via niza@niza.nl

Voor meer informatie zie www.niza.nl/publications

7 Mokgósi, the only newspaper fully in Setswana

Background

By Methaetsile Leepile

When a group of Batswana started toying around with the idea of establishing a Setswana newspaper way in 1999, they had lingering doubts about its acceptability, let alone its viability. Their concern was borne out of the continuing erosion of the national language, a language which is part of one of Africa's largest linguistic groups, the Sotho-Tswana, but which has been neglected by the government since the country became a republic 38 years ago.

In its heyday, Setswana was a language of record – it was used everywhere: in the dikgotla (traditional open courts), in the Government administration and as a medium of instruction in the schools. In one of those ironies of development, the colonial administration required its officers to have a working knowledge of Setswana before they could be posted overseas or even get promoted!

Such gestures were reversed in the period after Independence. Government has not invested in the national language, despite recognising it as the lingua franca and a vehicle of communication to the vast majority of the populace. If nothing is done to address this neglect now, the language would gradually die a natural death.

It gives me some comfort that interest in the language amongst its speakers has not waned. The Mokgósi newspaper, which was launched two-and-half-years ago, is living testimony to this commitment.

8 Major prizes

Started on a shoestring budget and freelance staff in 2002, Mokgósi won three major prizes six months into its launch. Its pioneering work was recently acknowledged by MISA when it awarded the writer, a founding member of the group and the paper's project manager, the regional Press Freedom Award.

Mokgósi is owned by a consortium of 43 shareholders. They are drawn from all walks of life. They are motivated by one thing: the desire to rekindle their language with a view to ensuring that Setswana becomes part and parcel of the national development agenda. They all wish to see Setswana taking its rightful place among the polity of world languages: a modern language that is used to economically empower the population and foster participatory democracy.

Language is about knowledge. It is through language that a people expresses all that it knows about its culture, education, politics, medicine, science, philosophy, magic, plants, animals and the universe. Oral tradition is a great source of information for any society. Most of the older generation in Botswana are dying, and with them their knowledge.

It is important therefore, that the spoken word must be collected and a corpus for the language built and stored in written format. From that we can construct dictionaries and grow the technical capacity of the language. A newspaper like Mokgósi can be indispensable in facilitating such a process.

Competing

It is of course all too easy to talk about popularising a language through the media. After everything is said and done, the reality is that Mokgósi competes for readers and advertising with other titles, both national and international, that grace our newspaper stands. Where the policy environment to support a national language is non-existent like in Botswana, the task of penetrating the market becomes more onerous. That task becomes doubly difficult where the government of the day is paranoid about the emergence of a powerful indigenous press and wants to see it fail.

Traditionally, newspapers in small population economies like Botswana's subsist on advertising. In Mokgósi's case, advertising constitutes 98% of the paper's revenue. During the first year, 90% of that figure was from establishment advertising alone. Since the Government decided to commercialise its free distribution Daily News earlier this year, we have seen the paper's advertising revenue from Government plummet by as much as 40%.

Cog in a wheel

The hard reality is that a small newspaper like Mokgósi can neither compete adequately in the market with its limited circulation and low levels of capitalisation nor can it attract experienced personnel to compete with the more established titles in the short to medium term.

Failure is of course never an option. What needs to be done is to come up with a comprehensive strategy that will force the language question on the table at the national level. A national champion for the language, collaborating with but not associated to Government, needs to be set up. Mokgósi's role should be that of a cog in a wheel; a catalyst that facilitates change but itself remains true to its mission: a newspaper that publishes in Setswana to further press freedom.

To survive, the paper must continuously re-invent itself in terms of its brand of journalesque and appearance. It will have to draw on the critical mass of its 43 shareholders to penetrate the market in a short period of time. It will have to re-write the newspaper business manual by demonstrating that it is possible to penetrate a small market of readers through subscription sales as opposed to advertising. For the strategy to succeed, each and everyone of the shareholders would have to play their share in promoting the paper's sales in one way or the other.

Methaetsile Leepile is a director of Mokgósi and the newspaper's project manager. Mokgósi is the first newspaper to publish in Setswana in 50 years. email: leepilem@mmegi.bw