



Media News

Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa

MediaNews 20- February 2006/ Quarterly newsletter of NiZA 's Media Programme

Marking Southern African media freedom

Interview

The African Media Barometer (AMB) of the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) is not just one more research initiative on press freedom, says project manager Peter Schellschmidt. According to Schellschmidt, it is a unique survey.

In Botswana, the radio and television stations are run as government departments, with frequent government interventions in programmes, while the print media there scores significantly better. This was one of the unexpected results that came to the fore last year during research conducted for the AMB project. "That was a surprising result and we will fully support organisations trying to change that," says Schellschmidt.

Schellschmidt is project manager of the FES Media Program and is based in Windhoek, Namibia's capital. He was instrumental in the realisation of the AMB project. "From the countries where AMB has been done so far, Botswana and Swaziland lacked the most in media independence, especially in terms of broadcasting

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NiZA's Media Programme supports civil society organisations in Southern Africa that contribute to the creation of more democratic and open societies where governments are held accountable to citizens' needs and interests. To this end the Media Programme supports the strengthening of our partner organisations so that they can: 1. Influence the media and freedom of expression policies and legal environment in the SADC region to reach a conducive freedom of expression environment, 2. Increase access to information for citizens, 3. Train media professionals to deliver more balanced and accurate information on key political, social and economic issues, 4. Improve the financial sustainability of media outlets.

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But to a degree, this is true for all countries in Southern Africa, except maybe South Africa.”

Frameworks

The AMB is an in-depth look into media organisations in Southern Africa conducted by media representatives and civil rights and gender groups from the countries themselves. FES Media facilitates the talks and serves as a mediator. It also compiles individual reports of each country. “We are particularly interested in the political and legal framework,” said Schellschmidt. “With that I mean issues such as legislation and the level of self-regulation of the media.”

In 2005 the AMB was conducted in Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia. Before September this year it will spread to South Africa, Tanzania, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe.



Representatives from media and civil society during de AMB Namibia in May 2005

Self-assessment

The other two main partners of FES are the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), who were involved in all Barometers so far, and the Southern African Broadcasting Association (SABA), the umbrella organisation of state broadcasters. Schellschmidt: “The first real challenge for the AMB project was to try and get them to work together. As MISA is

a freedom of expression organisation, they did not exactly like the idea of working with - in many cases - government-controlled broadcasters. But it worked in the end.”

There are plenty of studies done on media in Southern Africa. But according to Schellschmidt, the AMB is unique. “That’s because it is a self-assessment. Namibia judges Namibia, Botswana judges Botswana. We feared that at first this approach might cause countries to view themselves in a ‘patriotic’ way but luckily that has not surfaced that much. Even in Swaziland, where people are extremely proud of the king and the monarchy.”

Scoring card

Basically, the AMB is a scoring card for media freedom in Southern African countries. It gives scores on certain sectors such as promotion of freedom of expression, diversity in the media landscape, independence of broadcasters, and the standard of media practice. Each individual sector gets a score, from which the overall score of the country is calculated.

“The results so far are not really surprising if you know the Southern African media landscape,” says Schellschmidt. “But across the board, you can say there is a lack of media independence of all countries done so far, especially in terms of broadcasting. Along with Botswana there are also considerable issues in Swaziland and Zambia. The worst problems we will no doubt see in Zimbabwe when the AMB takes place there.”

Although the AMB is self-regulated, there is opposition to it in the form of governments who dislike snooping around and are against transparency.

Schellschmidt: “This surfaces when the panel needs certain pieces of legislation

and has to go around the official departments to get it.”

Coalition

Nevertheless, the results of the Barometer are advantageous. Schellschmidt uses Swaziland as an example: “Right after the AMB was conducted there, representatives from the government asked MISA to develop a public broadcasting policy with them because there was no such thing before. This indicates a coalition between representatives of the media and civil society is being formed.”

This and similar situations in other places such as Zambia, proves the instrument is working, according to Schellschmidt. “We weren’t sure at first but now we are seeing positive reactions to the AMB from within the countries. A lot of interest has been created and there are plans to also do this in West Africa. So I am confident this is more than just another report.”

According to Schellschmidt, MISA is already taking up the results in some of the other countries too. He adds that when completed, the AMB will paint a comprehensive inside look into the media and freedom of information in Southern Africa. “A map as it were. It is also envisaged the AMB will take place every year, so it is not a once-off thing. The AMB produces a wealth of information on the situations in these countries. It is not just some research, but a political exercise.”

You will find the AMB country reports on the website: www.fesmedia.org.na (under news and events). Click [here](#) for more information on how the AMB was conducted.

By Jasper van der Blik

*Jasper van der Blik is a Dutch freelance journalist in Johannesburg.
jvdblik@hotmail.com*

New partnerships in Mozambique and Swaziland

News

NiZA's Media Programme recently formed three new partnerships with media organisations in Mozambique and Swaziland. The new partners are MISA Mozambique, FORCOM and MISA Swaziland.



Mozambique and Swaziland are focus countries in NiZA's support to media organisations in Southern Africa for the next three years. After fact-finding visits to both countries, NiZA decided to engage in three new partnerships starting in 2006.

In Mozambique, the national chapter of the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) was identified as a strategic organisation that receives wide support from the Mozambican media workers. Operating at national and provincial level, MISA Mozambique advocates for media freedom, access to information and a better legal environment for media.

With NiZA, MISA Mozambique will work on strengthening the organisational structures, new broadcasting legislation and campaigning for the Right to Information Law.

FORCOM

The national community radio network FORCOM (Fórum Nacional de Rádios Comunitárias Moçambique) was also identified as a new partner. FORCOM was founded in 2004 and represents about 45

community radio stations throughout Mozambique. The stations play an important role in local information dissemination and access to information for communities. The most immediate challenges for the sector are the financial sustainability of the stations and lobby for legislation for the sector.

In the partnership with NiZA, FORCOM will focus on strengthening the stations, especially in the north of the country, through training and networking with each other. Together with MISA Mozambique, FORCOM will start discussions in the provinces to inform the radios of their rights. These discussions will feed into the drafting of the new broadcasting law.

MISA Swaziland

In Swaziland, NiZA will among others, focus on improving press freedom and freedom of expression policies and legal framework. MISA Swaziland works on these issues and will be a partner to NiZA in this field. An important challenge for MISA Swaziland, as for many other organisations in Swaziland, will be how to deal with the Constitution and how to make sure it will be an effective instrument for a truly democratic political environment where the media can move freely and play their role as watchdogs of society without interference.

Also read the article written by the director of MISA Swaziland, Comfort Mabuza, on Swaziland's new constitution further on in this issue of MediaNews.

MISA Mozambique:

<http://www.misa.org/mozambique.html>

MISA Swaziland:

<http://www.misa.org/swaziland.html>

By Ruth de Vries and Fenneke Hulshoff Pol

Ruth de Vries (ruth.de.vries@niza.nl) is Programme Officer of NiZA's Media and

Freedom of Expression Programme.

Fenneke Hulshoff Pol

(fenneke.hulshoff@niza.nl) is Programme Officer Training Unit of NiZA's Media and Freedom of Expression Programme.

'It's all about sustainability'

Interview

After ten years of working for the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) director Luckson Chipare has decided that the time is right for a career change. The director and two colleagues reflect on his decade at MISA.

Who would have ever thought that Luckson Chipare would rise from the finance and administration's department of MISA to become the media watch dog's regional director? His appointment in August 2000 without a background in journalism led to criticism, remembers MISA specialist in freedom of media monitoring Zoe Titus. "People questioned his ability, but he has surpassed all expectations."

He acquainted himself with the plight of MISA and the activities of all the national offices. Chipare actually became the face of MISA. The director proved his critics wrong by leading the NGO to a sustainable future. "Nowadays MISA is the best-funded NGO in the region," says Titus.

But after working for ten years at MISA, a long-standing partner of NiZA, Chipare decided it is time to look for new challenges; to leave his comfort zone and start a consulting business. "I joined MISA in 1996 in the finance and administration department," the director says looking back. "And when in 2000 the post for director became vacant I applied."

Vision

At that time it wasn't so much a media man MISA needed, but someone with a strategic vision. Being praised as a 'great fundraiser', Chipare set out to introduce

long term planning and aimed to improve the coordination and cooperation between the eleven national offices across southern Africa. “This strategic planning took off fantastic,” claims Chipare. “I wanted to create an organization with secure funding.”

“Since 2005 we’re working with a five-year plan and so far 60 percent of the budget has been committed. Sustainability is an issue of importance.” Instead of donors giving money to individual projects, Chipare decided it was better to collect the money and divide it over what he named ‘baskets’: for programmes around gender balance in newsrooms, funds for the different regional offices and media advocacy for instance. This way the money could be managed and put to better use. “But a lot of work still needs to be done,” reflects Chipare.

Particularly the continuous suppression of independent media and journalists in Zimbabwe weighs heavy on Luckson Chipare’s heart. Not only in his position as director of MISA, but also personally. “I’m from Zimbabwe and have first hand experience. I personally know many of the journalists who were arrested.” All the advocacy in the world only made a small difference, if any difference at all.

Heaven and earth

According to the director, he and the staff of the regional MISA office in Harare have moved heaven and earth to sensitise Zimbabwean politicians to the causes of media freedom and freedom of expression. Petitions were handed over and demonstrations at Zimbabwean embassies staged. “We even took some politicians on a tour to South Africa to experience the Act of the right to information since South Africa has the world’s most liberal policy on that issue.” But to no avail, says 50-year-old Chipare with a grim smile. “He often had things to say which can’t have made him very popular with the

Zimbabwean authorities,” says MISA Namibia chairperson Robin Tyson. “It takes an element of courage. I found Luckson to be a very strong and brave person.”

Successor

It is not certain yet when the MISA director will quit his post since a successor hasn’t been found yet. But it is expected that Chipare will leave the end of March. Meanwhile the director vividly remembers his early days at MISA a couple of years after the NGO was founded in 1992 by worried editors from southern Africa. Editors from for instance Zambia and Namibia decided that an organisation was needed to campaign for media freedom.



Luckson Chipare

“It was a time that governments dominated the media. The editors were concerned about the survival and development of private independent media,” the director says. “Gradually we shifted from media freedom to matters of freedom of expression and the right to information. I strongly believe MISA is not just for journalists only.”

He always advocated for an enhanced awareness amongst citizens that they are not just consumers, but that they can hold broadcasters and newspapers accountable for the services media provide. Much like one would hold an electrician responsible for fixing the wires properly, mentions Chipare.

Although MISA is in safer waters, Chipare's successor has his work cut out for him. "He should focus on raising more funds," advises the director whose legacy will sound on after he leaves. "He established an organisation that has a future," says MISA Namibia chairperson Tyson. "What he has done can't be put on a few pieces of paper. His successor will have a difficult time filling his shoes," concludes MISA specialist Titus.

Media Institute of Southern Africa:
<http://www.misa.org>

Arjen de Boer works for The Big Issue Namibia in Windhoek through NiZA's program for young professional journalists. E-mail: arjendeboer_nl@yahoo.com

Civil society: 'More could have been achieved at WSIS'

Reportage

In November 2005, The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) took place in Tunis. Representatives from African civil society attended the meeting to ensure that the African perspective was present in both the discussions as well as in the outcomes of this Summit.



The Summit in Tunis was the last stage in global discussions on how to build a "people centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society." A visible sign of the presence of African civil society during the Summit was the African Market, part of the information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) Exhibition, an area where delegates could meet NGOs who have been active in the WSIS process from the start of it.

Among them were two NiZA partner organisations, the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA), and the Highway Africa News Agency (HANA). The HANA team, led by Highway Africa Director Chris Kabwato, consisted of 24 journalists from all over the African continent. Every day this team produced news articles for the HANA website, for their own home newspapers and for the conference newsbulletin that briefed delegates on the previous days events.

The Summit, as well as the process leading up to it from 2001 onwards, has resulted in increasing coverage of ICT issues by African journalists for an African audience. In this sense, HANA has succeeded in addressing issues of lack of African content, both on policy makers level as well as for the African audiences. HANA will continue to cover such events and create African content at other African and international forums. For Kabwato, the WSIS has been a perfect training ground to firmly establish HANA.

Consensus

In the meantime, the delegates fell back into a usual phenomenon at UN Summits: Lengthly discussions on textual technicalities. The resulting Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda contained comemorable phrases on freedom of expression, accessibility and the need for proper infrastructure. However, it avoided some hot potatoes, such as American control over domain name attribution (a Forum will be established to further address the issue of e-governance) and the need for legislative reform in countries with repressive legislation such as Zimbabwe and host Tunisia (international standards will be developed, but appropriate laws at the national level remain the domain of national governments, taking into account their national context).

Another key aspect was funding of all that needs to be done (existing mechanisms should be better utilised and funding for an established Global ICT Fund remains voluntary). This watered-down text was the reason for civil society representatives to issue its own statement entitled 'Much more could have been achieved'.

MISA

Nevertheless, the WSIS Summit saw increased civil society participation, including African representatives, and some (albeit small) successes in the sphere of lobby and advocacy. MISA, in partnership with South Africa based Rhodes University and other African NGOs, were able to increase awareness on the importance of ICT issues with governments from the region.

South Africa, for example, had a preparatory process including civil society, and the Botswana government underlined the importance of civil society by not only inviting representatives in its delegation, but also enabling their participation by paying their way to Tunis.

According to Tracey Naughton, former MISA Broadcasting Officer leading the Media Caucus since 2003, civil society efforts have had some impacts on the outcomes. Civil society has been awarded a role as one of the three important stakeholders in the document, and has also been granted this role in the follow-up mechanisms agreed upon.

This is certainly also due to their work during the whole WSIS phase. According to both Kabwato and MISA Regional Director Luckson Chipare, the WSIS resulted at least in a document showing commitments. Moreover, the collaboration between MISA and Rhodes University, as well as with other civil society organisations, has created a firm basis from which to proceed. For MISA the official WSIS-documents include areas that can be

incorporated in their programs. The basis for further lobby and advocacy to hold governments to their commitment to contribute to a free and accessible information society has been established.

Official WSIS website:
<http://www.itu.int/wsis/>

Civil Society statement 'Much more could have been achieved':
<http://www.worldsummit2005.org/>

An article prepared by journalist Christiane Kaess on the WSIS as well as audio interviews with a.o. Chris Kabwato are available on NiZA's website:
www.niza.nl/wsis

By Christian Kuijstermans

*Christian Kuijstermans
(christian.kuijstermans@niza.nl) is
Programme Officer of NiZA's Media and
Freedom of Expression Programme.*

New managing editor Behind the Mask

Newsflash

Mashilo Mnisi is the new managing editor of Behind The Mask, an online magazine on gay and lesbian affairs in Africa based in Johannesburg. He graduated at Wits University in Johannesburg with Honours degree in Media and Writing. Among other jobs, Mnisi worked as a writer for the Mail and Guardian and gained experience at the SABC News Research Division for TV and radio before producing SA FM's PM LIVE news and current affairs. Before he joined Behind The Mask he was editor of Campus Times, the only national tertiary newspaper. Mnisi can be reached at: mashilo@mask.org.za

Website Behind The Mask:
<http://www.mask.org.za/>

Swaziland's new constitution and media policy

Background

The Information and Media Policy that was adopted by the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland at the end of 2005 has brought some welcome progress to the issue of government's policy direction insofar as the operations of the media in the country are concerned.

This is especially the case as government and the media sector have been locked in a somewhat antagonistic relationship for several years with the government and traditional authorities accusing the media for being irresponsible in their reporting. This accusation has been hinged on the media being held as responsible for the poor image and negative portrayal of the country and its leadership, particularly the King and members of the royal family.

This latent conflict, which was exacerbated by the absence of such a policy and the existence of a plethora of restrictive media legislation that was and still is prohibitive of and punitive of the media's operation, almost culminated in the adoption of a very draconian Media Council Bill in 1997. The adoption of the Bill would have severely curtailed free media activity. Fortunately the Bill was not adopted. The issue was referred back to stakeholders and their collective input has now resulted in the 2005 Media Policy.

Of additional importance in government's adoption of the media policy is that it comes hot on the heels of the assent by King Mswati III to the new constitution of the country. The constitution's adoption is a critical historical milestone in that Swaziland has been without such a document for over three decades after the then King, Sobhuza II repealed the 1968 Independence constitution in 1973.

Both the policy and the constitution are not perfect documents. In fact the constitution has elicited criticism because the power of governance continues to ultimately vest in the office of the King supported by the traditional authorities and institutions. Nonetheless, it is important that whatever entry points are available for progress in the media via use of both the policy and the constitution be utilised.

Key issues

The policy acknowledges the important role played by media in the progressive development of society as well as the prevailing challenges that make the operational environment difficult for the media to be as effective. The policy enumerates these as including the overrepresentation of government in the media sector with regard to ownership, the existence of antiquated laws which are not only unsuitable for the promotion of the media but also have not adapted to such significant developments as the advent of information and communication technologies, as well as the present governmental culture of secrecy rather than openness and the respect of the right of the citizens to access information.

There is an articulated commitment in the policy to deal with the outdated and restrictive legislative environment in the country, namely, the Swaziland Post and Telecommunications Act of 1983, Swaziland Television Authority Act of 1983, Official Secrets Act of 1968, and the Books and Newspapers Act of 1963. These acts place control of the media and access to information firmly in the hands of government and inhibit entry and effective operation of independent media.

Amongst the policy's guidelines for its implementation, several key issues for attention are identified. These include the necessity to apply the "Bill of Rights ... as a guideline for guaranteeing the freedoms to hold, impart, and share ideas...; review

of legislation which impinges on ...media freedoms, and free speech with a view to update and/ or introduce supportive mechanisms and identify gaps in skills weaknesses and financing mechanisms that address needs of mass media development.”

Additionally important is that the policy recognises the importance of the right to access information, which is a departure from previous government positions.

The constitution

The constitution’s provisions in this regard are a change from the 1973-entrenched position where these rights were deliberately removed from the 1968 constitution and this change may provide room for the manoeuvring creatively of the media in performing its mandate. Section 24 specifically deals with the protection of the freedom of expression and provides for freedom of expression and opinion the protection of that freedom which extends to the press and the media.

On the face of it, the provisions seem impressive in that they seem to correspond to the accepted expectations that freedom of expression includes freedom to receive and impart information. However, the provision falls short in that there is no recognition or protection of the right to access information. In this regard, the media policy is more progressive and could be used to lobby for the promulgation of access to information legislation.

MISA’s role

MISA Swaziland must position herself in such a way as to ensure that the windows of opportunity that have been created by the policy and constitution are maximised. MISA is one of many civil society bodies in the country who are participating in the catalysis of change. Therefore, it is important that the role that MISA plays through its mandate, complements those of other organisations.

MISA has identified several entry points of appropriate responses. With regard to advocacy, MISA’s activities will include involvement in law reform and ensuring the removal of existing restrictive laws and appropriate amendment of such laws or promulgation of new legislation that will comply with the stated principles of the policy and constitution as well as promotion of pluralism of the media through the reduction of the State control of the media and the freeing of the airwaves by availability of broadcasting licenses.

One of the most crucial roles that MISA will imperatively have to play is that of strengthening the capacity of the media to effectively carry out their societal responsibility. MISA continues to work closely in this regard with the Swaziland National Association of Journalists (SNAJ), the Editors’ Forum, the Media Women’s Association of Swaziland (MWASWA).

The policy and the constitution seem to introduce some positive developments. However, it is extremely important to understand these developments in context and thus the potential for their successful implementation. There have been several policies adopted by government, which have not proceeded to implementation. Hence there will be no progressive developments unless there is political will on the part of authorities to willingly engage in the process of change in accordance with the expressed precepts.

By Comfort Mabuza

Comfort Mabuza(misa@africaonline.co.sz) is the National Director of MISA-Swaziland.

Website MISA Swaziland:

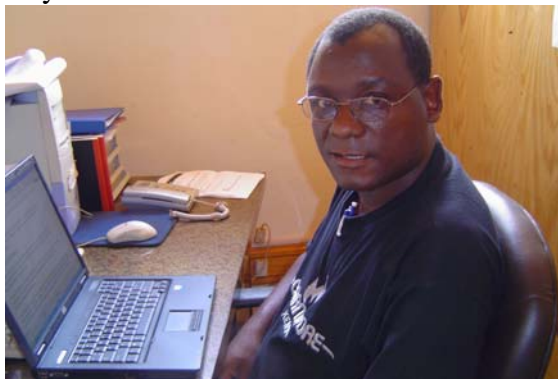
<http://www.misa.org/swaziland.html>

Prize came at the right time

News

Every year the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and NiZA hand out the John Manyarara Investigative Journalism Award. The award recognises the most promising investigative work in Southern Africa.

The winner receives 2.000 euro in cash and a scholarship worth 10.000 euro. Each year the prize-giving takes place around 3 May to co-incide with World Press Freedom Day.



Hilary Mbobe

In 2005 Malawian journalist Hilary Mbobe was awarded the prize for his radio feature *Debts and Daughters*, a programme about families in northern Malawi who resort to selling their daughters into marriage to pay off their debts.

Own business magazine

Mbobe used part of the prize money to fund the start-up of his magazine *Business Evolution*. “One of the impediments for investigative journalists is to have their stories published by their editors,” says Mbobe. “With the establishment of my own magazine I am being empowered to publish my own investigative works as well as that of others.”

Mbobe continues: “And although there were logistical problems on funding, I managed to do an internship with the Malawi Economic Justice Network between August and December 2005. The

funding could never have come at a better time!”

He adds that the scholarship part of the prize will be allocated to finish his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Journalism. “I will complete my studies later this year. My subjects include Research Methods, Media Telecommunications, Investigative Journalism, Media History, Media criticism, and Media management.”

The submission deadline for the John Manyarara Investigative Journalism Award 2006 is March 3. Reports should be sent by courier to Bonita Kanguotui, 21 Johann Albrecht Street, Windhoek West, Namibia or by airmail to Private Bag 13386, Windhoek, Namibia. For more information, contact bonita@misa.org.

Website John Manyarara Investigative Journalism Award:

<http://www.misa.org/Manyararaaward.html>

New co-ordinator SAMTRAN

Newsflash

On 1 September 2005 Ruth Ayisi was appointed as the new part-time co-ordinator of SAMTRAN (Southern Africa Media Trainers Network) based in Maputo. She has a strong media background working as a journalist first for a short while in London and then in Africa, mainly southern Africa, for most of the past 20 years. She is a specialist in HIV/Aids and gender issues. She will work on the revival of SAMTRAN and strives to make it into a vibrant and useful network for its members. Ruth Ayisi can be reached at rayisi@tvcabo.co.mz

Website SAMTRAN: www.samtran.org

Forging continental cohesion

Comment

Africa's growing determination to take charge of its affairs took an important step forward late last year with the formation of a continental civil society Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO), that aims to fundamentally improve the freedom of expression environment on the continent over the next decade.

Founded by 33 organisations in late October at a meeting in Ghana, a smaller coordinating group has been charged to lead its affairs including the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) - who will also act as the host organisation - the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Media Rights Agenda (MRA) in Nigeria, *Journalistes en Danger* (JED) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Africa office of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the West African Journalists Association (WAJA), *Organisation des Medias d'Afrique Centrale* (OMAC/OCAM) and the All Africa Editors Forum.

Two of the above – MISA and JED - and another member of the network, the Freedom of Expression Institute in South Africa (FXI), are partner organisations of NiZA's media programme.



Counterweight

This development is significant. African civil society organisations need to coordinate with each other across the entire continent to form a civil society counterweight to the African Union (AU), the continent's influential inter-

governmental organisation. The AU established the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as two of its major strategies to achieve economic growth and improved democratic governance.

The AU has also established important continental institutions such as the Pan African Parliament (PAP), the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), as well as a Freedom of Expression Rapporteur and is in the process of establishing an African Court of Human Rights. Much debate exists about NEPAD and the APRM, particularly about its exclusion of civil society as a grassroots partner in formulating its vision and strategies, as well as its economic approaches that some fear will further subjugate Africa to economic globalisation and Northern dependence.



Persistent lobbying of the APRM – funded by NiZA - also had to take place to ensure that freedom of expression criteria – initially all but excluded from the APRM - are included in assessing the state of governance in countries under review.

In order to lobby usefully with some of these relatively new and largely welcome African institutions, and the United Nations and other international institutions abroad, and to ensure that African civil society has a voice, it is imperative that strong African continental civic organisations are formed and assisted with resources.

Determination

It is commendable that organisations concerned with freedom of expression and media freedom are in the forefront of the trend. Some of the networks members,

including MISA and unions of journalists, regularly deliver testimony to the ACHPR in relation to media freedom abuses, for instance about Zimbabwe.

The formation of NAFEO is also important for another reason. The idea was borne indigenously and reflects the determination of the freedom of expression sector to speak with an independent African voice and to be the leading agency internationally for improvement in this sector.

Substantial capacity and expertise has been developed by organisations such as MISA, the MFWA, MRA, JED and the FXI over the last decade. They are proud organisations with enough administrative and operational expertise among them to also advise newly formed cross-border sub-regional organisations such as OMAC in central Africa on organisational development issues, programmes and strategies as well as to assist the growth of currently absent but seriously needed sub-regional organisations in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and in North Africa.

International connections

The network also values its connections with international freedom of expression organisations. Nine of these attended the founding meeting and are non-African members of the network including Free Voice in The Netherlands, Article 19 - the Global Campaign for Free Expression, International Media Support, Index on Censorship, the Network Media Programme and Justice Initiative of the Open Society Institute, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).

NAFEO's first resolution adopted at the meeting calls among others on the African Union to take into account freedom of expression in the African Peer Review Mechanism; urges African governments to

adopt a Treaty on Freedom of Expression; and urges the African Union to urgently establish the African Court on Human Rights. It also called for the release of all arbitrarily detained Eritrean journalists and political prisoners held incommunicado since 2001 and for an independent investigation into the murder of journalist Deyda Hyndara in the Gambia.

MISA www.misa.org
MFWA www.mfwaonline.org
JED www.jed-congo.org
MRA www.mediarightsagenda.org
FXI www.fxio.org.za

By Jeanette Minnie

Jeanette Minnie is an advisor to NiZA on the issue of freedom of expression:

jcmin@iafrica.com

New director SAIMED

Newsflash

NiZA's partner SAIMED (the Southern Africa Institute for Media Entrepreneurship Development) has appointed a new director: Jacqueline Kabeta. She is the successor of Dick Maganga and started her position in January 2006. Among others, Kabeta has worked several years at ZAMCOM, the Zambian media training institution. The past few years she has worked as a freelance media specialist. Kabeta can be reached at saimed@mega.bw



Jacqueline Kabeta

Website SAIMED: www.saimed.org

My point of view

'Civic society must mobilize citizens'

Rashweat Mukundu, National Director of MISA-Zimbabwe discusses the political crisis in his country and the role of media freedom organizations.

Zimbabwe is governed by a class that believes that it did a favor to the poor African by freeing them from colonial rule, hence the poor African must forever be beholden to the so called liberators. Like in the colonial era, the media is marshaled to serve partisan interests and prop the hold to power of an elite.

The seizure of the passport of Trevor Ncube, end of 2005 and the intimidation directed against the Voice of the People Communications Trust at the same period points to a government that is not only paranoid but not sure of how to address the crisis Zimbabwe is facing, especially food shortages and a total economic collapse.

Trevor Ncube's two newspapers in Zimbabwe, The Zimbabwe Independent and The Standard are the most critical and truly privately owned media outlets remaining. The message to him is, shut up or you will be shut down.

Zimbabwe's Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), seen as aligned to one of the factions in the ruling party, has infiltrated the Daily and Sunday Mirror newspapers by buying shares through shelf companies. Now the editorial content of the two newspapers has changed for the worst.

The strategy is that, come 2008, the year Mugabe is expected to leave office, Trevor Ncube and his newspapers will be thoroughly intimidated and frightened, the opposition, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in total disarray, NGOs cowed into submission and there won't be

any serious threat to the ascendancy of Mugabe's chosen one. So far Vice President Joice Mujuru is the anointed one.

Media Alliance of Zimbabwe

In this entire gloomy outlook, what then is the role of media freedom organisations? Since 2003, MISA-Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists, Independent Journalists Association of Zimbabwe and the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) have come together to form an alliance, the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) with the specific objective of defending the remaining media outlets and seek the repeal of repressive legislation.

With support from NiZA, MAZ launched an international lobby campaign that has targeted the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) based in Banjul, Gambia.

The ACHPR in December 2005 produced a damning report on Zimbabwe's media legislation and its treatment of media workers, among many other human rights abuses that were noted. The ACHPR position marks a major shift in the policy of most African governments in their relations with Zimbabwe. In the past Zimbabwe had the unequivocal support of African government as the crisis in Zimbabwe was portrayed along racial lines, white vs. black.

Utilising the court

The role of MAZ in all this, is to keep the pressure on the Zimbabwe government by utilising the court, documenting and reporting media and freedom of expression rights abuses and assisting victims challenge the government in the local courts, at the ACHPR and other international forums.

African institutions such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the African Union Executive

Committee of Heads of States have an obligation to make sure that Zimbabwe is reigned in and that recommendations made by such African Union bodies as the ACHPR are implemented.

MAZ like many civic organisations has a role to play in strengthening bodies such as the ACHPR by utilising them so that they become more confident in tackling African leaders, hitherto seen as untouchables. MAZ and other civic organisations have managed to defend media workers in the courts despite the 120 arrests that have been witnessed in the past five years.

Communities

This work must continue and must be linked to community mobilisation. It is for this reason that one of MAZ's partners, MISA-Zimbabwe has come up with community radio initiatives in eight small towns in Zimbabwe, to address: first the information needs of communities, create awareness on what community radio is and encourage communities to form community radio structures and seek licensing. Community radio is a pivotal issue by which ordinary citizens can take part in addressing the skewed media environment in Zimbabwe.

The MMPZ, another MAZ partner, is working with grassroots organisations in addressing issues of access to information through the Public Information Rights Campaign. Access to information in this sense is not about reading a newspaper or listening to the radio, but about day to day information needs that citizens face: on ARVs distribution and HIV-AIDS treatment, land ownership and agricultural inputs distribution, food distribution, birth and death records, among many others. These issues are at the core of challenges that ordinary persons face and it is incumbent that they know that access to information is a right.

It is my belief that Zimbabwe, and indeed Africa, will not transform its governance structures if ordinary citizens are left out in this struggle. All civic society work therefore must aim to mobilise citizens, not only to resist dictatorships but also build democratic structures and be aware of what freedom of expression, among other rights, means.

MAZ has a role to play in linking access to information issues to the day-to-day needs and struggles of the ordinary Zimbabwean, to ensure enabling legislation will be enacted and that it becomes a living organism that is not just a paper on the shelf.

By Rashweat Mukundu

Rashweat Mukundu is the director of MISA-Zimbabwe.

E-mail: director.misa@zimbaweb.net