



Media News

Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa

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Minister denies NiZA's subsidy request

The Dutch government's recent decision to reject funding for NiZA has dealt the organisation a major blow and has left the NGO, which relies heavily on government funding, still reeling in shock.

NiZA is required to file an application for funding to the government every four years. NiZA requested a 28 million Euros subsidy for 2007-2010. Over the last four years NiZA received 25 million Euros from both direct and indirect subsidies from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On the recommendation of an external advisory committee, the minister has decided to deny NiZA's request. Apparently NiZA fails to make a reasonable case for being able to generate 25% of her budget from funds other than those drawn from the Dutch government by 2009, which she states as a pre-condition for her funding. NiZA believes that it will indeed comply with this demand. Already now, NiZA is in compliance with this condition whereas it is not formally compulsory until 2009. Therefore, NiZA plans to lodge an appeal on these grounds. Next to this NiZA is also investigating why the external advisory committee granted

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NiZA low scores for its organisation and its programmes, whereas these deviate considerably from the positive results and evaluations that have been found in the past year under the authority of the very same government. In doing this, NiZA will not refrain from looking at its own organisation with a critical eye.

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.

www.niza.nl/medianews
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According to director Peter Hermes the programmes that NiZA execute in Southern Africa are mainly financed from other resources, but the overhead costs, like for example to pay the staff and office are not. Therefore, loss of government funding could make it difficult to implement all programmes. Despite this recent setback, NiZA will continue to support democracy processes in southern Africa.



Urgent need for community radio in Angola

At the end of September, representatives of civil society, public and private sector media professionals and members of communities in the provinces of Huambo, Huíla, Benguela and Malange met in Luanda at an international conference to analyse the community radio movement in Angola. The meeting was an initiative of Action for Rural and Environmental Development (*Acção para o Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente - ADRA*) and supported by the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA), and the Portuguese NGO Association for Co-operation between Peoples (*Associação para a Cooperação entre os povos - ACEP*).

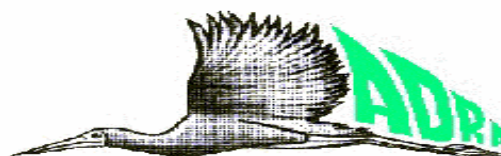
Nobody has any doubts about the importance of radio for the economic, social and cultural development of local communities and as a forum for public participation, social interaction and the democratisation of debate, ideas and society. This point of view was supported by experts from Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Portugal who contributed their knowledge of the issue to the discussions in Luanda.

However, there are no community radios in Angola. The new Press Law, passed in May this year, authorised the creation of community radios, but cannot yet be used

because no regulations have yet been issued to guide implementation. It is urgent to approve specific legislation to resolve this matter. Participants made their opinions known on this issue.

Potential

Nevertheless, such legal limitations have not prevented communities from taking the initiative to start using this valuable instrument of communication, which has the potential to question current methods and models of governance. As in other countries, initiatives in Angola seek to provide a response to aspirations for change, in a country of profound social inequalities, where 68 per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty and where government services do not meet the needs of local communities.



Participants described their experiences at the conference. They all told of attempts to broadcast using small radio transmitters installed in the backyards of poor neighbourhoods throughout Angola. The people's message about the problems in their neighbourhood began to be heard, although within a limited range. However, it was enough for local authorities to clamp down on this exercise of the freedom of expression.

The situation in Angola is very similar to that in other countries where radios have appeared to defend the interests of communities. Fátima Proença, one of the speakers from Portugal, pointed out that worsening poverty, social exclusion and political instability were the common denominators in the emergence of community radios.

Legal diploma

The concept of community radio as radio created by and for the community was not questioned. However, participants disagreed about what would be the most appropriate model for community radio in Angola, given the country's social and cultural complexity. The conference therefore proposed that the drafting of a future law on this type of radio should consider aspects such as the idea of property, the concept of community and its social and anthropological characteristics, issues associated to sustainability, radio frequency and the broadcasting range of community radios.

Conference participants felt that such a process should be fully participatory and involve the highest possible number of interested parties. Participants also committed themselves to lobbying Parliament to quickly approve the legal diploma that will regulate the establishment of community radios. However, participants recommended that the legal diploma should be the subject of a public discussion before approval, in the same way as the Land Law.

The Luanda conference agreed on the need to continue the debate on community radios in other forums in order to be able to go into more detail about technical aspects, mechanisms for funding community radios and programme content.

The conference ended with participants convinced of the need to continue campaigning for diversity in the media, considering that community radios, despite their limited range of action, could serve as genuine forums for expression (in the words of Ladislau Robalo, from Guine-Bissau), facilitate access to information and give real power to local communities, making them active participants in the process of development and in the construction of democracy in Angola.

By Anacleta Pereira.

Anacleta Pereira (anacletap@angola.osisa.org) is a Jurist and Media Consultant based in Luanda, Angola.

Links:

ACEP: www.acep.pt/main.asp

TBI into street soccer

Newsflash

NiZA's media programme partner *The Big Issue Namibia* played in the Homeless World Cup street soccer tournament at the end of September. Football teams from 48 countries gathered to "kick off global poverty" in a street soccer stadium built on the site of Nelson Mandela's first public address after his release from prison in 1990 in Cape Town, South Africa. Namibia came in 29th.



Before the tournament, Namibian coach Bethuel Uirab was quoted by www.streetsoccer.com as saying that success at the Homeless World Cup is not down to winning alone: “Last year we were declared the Happiest Team of the tournament. Besides winning, that is our second main goal for this year too!”

Links:

Homeless World Cup:
www.streetsoccer.orgThe Big Issue
Namibia: www.bigissuenamibia.org



Rural Mozambique: stories of rights, rules and repression

A broad spectrum of journalists and civil society organisations (CSO’s) gathered in Pemba, northern Mozambique in September in a bid to bridge the gap between the two sectors.

The first in a series of Pre-conditions for Elections Programme Southern Africa (PEPSA) seminars, the event was organised by AMODE, the Mozambican association for the development of democracy.

Journalists and representatives of CSO’s came together at Wimbe Beach in Pemba from various districts in the three northern provinces, to discuss how the local media and civil organisations could improve communication and knowledge sharing between each other.

Under the banner of “Media and Civil Society for the extension of democratic space”, the participants discussed themes such as: the role and responsibilities of media and CSO’s in electoral processes; the press law and the space for independent radios; access to information as a sine qua non for better governance; protection of human rights activists and journalists against abuse of power.

Frelimo

Representatives of NiZA partner organisations MISA, Human Rights League (LDH), Mozambican Debt Group and others gave input about existing laws and citizens’ rights in the country. Several people noticed the tendency of the ruling party, Frelimo, to redirect the Mozambican democracy into a one-party system. Frelimo is actually very active in mobilising its members and even attracting (some say ‘buying’) members of the main opposition party, Renamo. But then it is also true that the opposition is quite lethargic and does not succeed to motivate people.

As Salomão Moyana, director of the independent weekly Zambeze, said: “Frelimo is the only party with a rational discourse, the others are just complaining”. He declined to blame only politicians for this. “On my frequent trips to the districts, I notice that the media contribute a lot to this mono-party tendency, especially Radio Mozambique and TVM (the national radio and TV station). This is not by chance. Some provincial departments of TVM have two cameras, one of which is donated by the governor to tape himself. The same goes for means of transport: if you don’t use them to report on governments’ business, they’ll be withdrawn.”

Death threats

As journalists are supposed to be the watchdogs of society, the situation begs the question: what can journalists do to counter this? Even community radios suffer psychological pressure. They lack the means to provide a professional service. Their workers aren’t even considered journalists; they are just ‘volunteers’. And frequently the local administrator thinks he ‘owns’ the local radio, and can decide what should be broadcast and what not. Pastor Matimbe, a linguistic technician of Swahili in Pemba,

was asked by Renamo to translate its manifest. He did so and the content was broadcast on the radio, resulting in Matimbe being harassed and receiving death threats. He fears so much for his life that he is now considering moving to Nampula.

Despite being pressurised by police and local authorities, small, independent newspapers seem to have a bit more space to report on what they think is of interest to the public. Buanamade Assane from Pemba's paper *Jornal Horizonte*, said he had been boycotted at a police press conference and subsequently threatened because he had written about a shooting incident on the basis of eye witnesses' reports, instead of copying the police's version.



Teresa Makanga of Rádio São Francisco

One participant drew special attention. Teresa Makanga, a 19-year-old girl from the distant district of Muidumbe, told the group she was working at a Catholic radio station, Radio São Francisco. But the astonishing thing was that she is working there all alone, with no support from anyone. In the mornings she goes to school, and every afternoon she broadcasts for four hours. She doesn't even get a pencil or a notebook from the priests. Relaying her story, she remembered an incident where a group of community elders had walked up to her house and tried to convince her father that Teresa should broadcast. Despite their obvious dissatisfaction, she continues. When asked

about her motivation, she says: "I'm learning every day", adding that she had travelled for two days to attend the seminar.

For her and many other participants, one of the most important achievements of the seminar was to have received so much information about laws and regulations, civic and human rights. Most of the participants from distant places had never before heard of organisations such as MISA and LDH - organisations that defend journalists and citizens when they are harassed by the authorities. The seminar ended with a critical declaration, including recommendations to civil organisations and local media to find ways and means to increase the circulation of information to the remotest villages.

By Elma Doeleman.

Elma Doeleman (elma.doeleman@niza.nl) is NiZA Country Co-ordinator Angola & Mozambique

About PEPSA:

PEPSA is a joint initiative of MISA (Media Institute for Southern Africa), HIVOS (Dutch humanist institute for development cooperation) and NiZA (Netherlands institute for Southern Africa) that aims to open up 'public space' for debate. NiZA has defined efforts to build bridges between media and civil society organisations as one important tool to reach this goal. The Pemba seminar was the first in a series of three, covering the north, centre and south of Mozambique.

For more information on PEPSA, also see MediaNews 17 – May 2005 – "Outside the Ballot Box". The new "Outside the Ballotbox" book will be launched during the annual PEPSA meeting in Johannesburg 16 – 17 November, and will be available from the national MISA offices. French and Portuguese translations will be produced on CD-rom and will be available up from December.

Call to investigative journalists

Newsflash

The Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR) has launched its Grants Fund for investigative journalism projects in Africa. Applications are invited for the two grants that are available for next year.

The grants, which are funded by the Netherlands Institute on Southern Africa (NiZA), are intended to be used by a journalist for an investigative journalism project that could not otherwise be completed due to a lack of time and/or resources.

The deadline for applications is 15 January 2007.

Links:

For more information go to the Events and Training chapter on the FAIR website: www.fairreporters.org

SW Radio: 'Zimbabwe's real stories must be told'

As the Zimbabwean media landscape is shrinking to become just the voice of the government, the need for independent journalism becomes ever more higher. London-based radio station SW Radio Africa tries to inform Zimbabweans in an objective way and give them a voice. "As journalists we have also become activists."

"We have got the fastest shrinking economy in the world. Our inflation rate is 1200 per cent. At least 4000 people die every week. And our media can be referred to as 'Mugabe's newsroom'." SW Radio Africa presenter and producer Violet Gonda speaks in clear language about her motherland Zimbabwe. At the recently organised NiZA event 'Africa on the Move' in Amsterdam, she performed, together with station manager and founder

Gerry Jackson, as an ambassador for free and independent media in the country.

In between short satiric theatre sketches she summarised the position of the Zimbabwean media today: "The only remaining broadcasters are 100 per cent state-controlled and almost the same goes for newspapers. Journalists have become nothing more than propaganda machines for Mugabe's Zanu-PF party. Reporters often play a double role: they tell Mugabe's story for the Zimbabwean media, and cover the real issues for foreign newspapers and press agencies. They take enormous risks. When they get caught, the state police will arrest them without doubt. All critical media have been banned by the government in the last couple of years. That is why SW Radio Africa moved to London in 2001."



Mugabe's Newsroom

Seven days a week

Jackson has tried to operate from Zimbabwe, but her work was made impossible by Mugabe's regime. Six years ago she started Capital FM in Harare - an independent radio station with no fear of being critical. After only six days on air, the station was shut down by armed state police guards. "I realised my career as an independent radio producer was under threat. If I wanted to continue doing my job, I had to move. So that is what happened", she explains.

After fruitlessly searching for a host country for her station in Southern Africa, Jackson moved to England. With a team of exiled Zimbabwean radio producers and journalists she started SW Radio Africa end of 2001 and has run it ever since. And despite all difficulties the station copes with, it broadcasts two hours live every day. Says Jackson: “And we do it seven days a week, 365 days a year. No one can stop us.”



Gerry Jackson (L) & Violet Gonda

Not surprisingly this statement collides with that of the Zimbabwean government. Since the first broadcast, Mugabe’s people have been jamming the station’s shortwave signal on a regular base. Gonda: “The jamming is one of our biggest problems because it makes us unable to reach parts of the Zimbabwean population. We have been doing everything to get around it, such as trying different frequencies and different broadcasting times.

“In addition, all our programmes are available on our website www.swradioafrica.com. But because many Zimbabweans don’t have an Internet connection available, radio is still the best way to reach them. The good thing is that we do still reach parts of Zimbabwe’s population on a daily base. Listeners tell us they spread the news we broadcast, because we are the only ones reporting on the real issues and problems they deal with. For me, that says enough about the necessity for us to exist.”

From the ground

Being a Zimbabwean radio station based in London is not ideal. But according to Gonda SW Radio Africa is still able to find the real stories and report ‘from the ground’. “During the years we found many ways to solve practical problems. One of our main goals is to give a voice to the voiceless. We have a mobile phone in Zimbabwe, which we put on voice mail. People can call to this cell phone and leave their number, as it is of course very expensive for them to phone to London.

“We have got people in Zimbabwe who listen to the messages and email or text us the numbers. In our programme ‘Callback’ we phone these people back and give them the chance to talk about their lives. We want to show what life is like for the majority of the Zimbabwean people nowadays. By letting them explain their own situation, we encourage other people on the ground to speak out as well. In that way, as journalists we have also become activists. We want Zimbabwe’s real stories to be told.”

Although the radio station has many organisational and financial problems, neither Gonda nor Jackson has not for a moment considered to quit. Jackson: “We are not able to sustain on our own and support from international donors has always been short term only. To make ends meet every month causes a lot of stress, but our work is too important to be stopped.”

Gonda adds: “In the beginning of this year there was not even enough money to pay the salaries, but none of us complained. We have been put under pressure many times. All staff at SW Radio Africa has been put on a black list. It was broadcasted on Zimbabwean state television that we are only welcome back in prison. Many journalists have fled the country. Only if any future ruling party will allow the media to be independent and critical there will be hope for Zimbabwe. Until that time

we have to keep fighting from overseas.”

By Danielle Batist.

Batist (daniellebatist@gmail.com) worked as a journalist for The Big Issue Namibia through NiZA’s Media programme for young professional journalists.

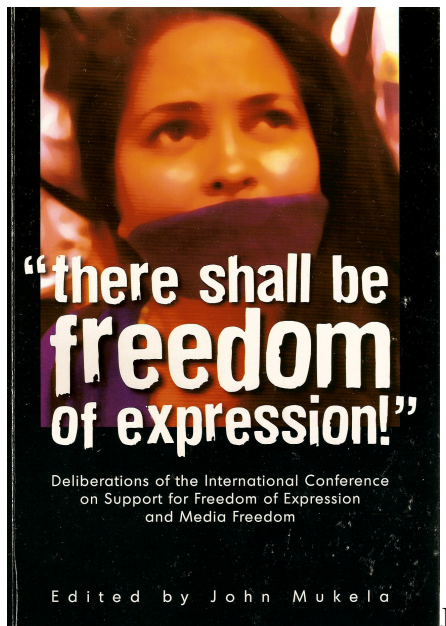
She currently works for a Dutch regional newspaper.

Links:

SW Radio Africa: www.swradioafrica.com

New Book NSJ

Newsflash



John Mukela, Executive Director of the NiZA's media programme partner Southern African Media Training Trust (NSJ), edited the book *“There shall be freedom of expression” Deliberations of the International Conference on Support for Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom.*

The report assesses the current status of media, human rights and democracy issues in southern Africa, and simultaneously

explores debates around issues of the media, human rights and democracy in the southern African region. It also identifies critical areas that require the direct intervention of the western donor community and provides recommendations of how donor funding can strategically be directed for the further development of the media, increased respect of human rights and the broadening of democratic practices in southern Africa.

To order the book contact the NSJ at: nsj@nsjtraining.org

Links:

NSJ: www.nsjtraining.org

Four investigative journos share 2006 John Manyarara Award

For the first time, the Media Institute for Southern Africa’s John Manyarara Award for investigative journalism was split between two productions this year.

Malawian *The Nation* journalist Mabvuto Banda accepted the award together with three colleagues from South Africa: Stefaans Brummer, Sam Sole and Wisani wa ka Ngobeni from the *Mail & Guardian*. The award was handed over on the 29th of August at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in Johannesburg, South Africa.

All four were rewarded with 2000 Euro in cash, while Banda was given an additional 4000 Euro scholarship to further improve his skills. The award aims to recognise excellence in investigative journalism in the Southern African region, with the exception of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius and Seychelles as MISA has no representation in these countries. It can be awarded to both printed articles and broadcasted documentaries. Usually the scholarship is 10 000 Euro, but in this case

6000 was already used to reward the three co-winners.

Banda, who won the Malawian Namisa Award earlier this year, was regarded as a

force to be reckoned with following his revealing report on how the Malawian minister of Education Yusuf Mwawa used public funds to finance his extravagant wedding. The story appeared in April 2005 in the Malawian newspaper *The Nation*. Despite threats from the minister's side, Banda pursued his investigation, which eventually led to the conviction of Mwawa and a sentence of 12 years imprisonment.



Jury members Anton Harber (left) and John Grobler (second from right) with MISA director Kaitira Kandjii (right) and the four Manvarara Prize winners

Oilgate

The Mail & Guardian team was awarded for their much praised 'Oilgate' series, in which they revealed how taxpayer's money was transferred from the South African state oil company to the ANC treasure chest, ahead of the 2004 national elections. Again threats and legal actions followed, preventing them from some publications and urging them to reveal the sources. But they prevailed, wrote the stories and never

named any sources. The series has revealed one of the biggest scandals in South African history.

Last year's winner of the John Manyarara Award, Malawian Hilary Mbombe, was present at the ceremony and commented on how it boosted his career. "It increased my self-esteem and equipped me with a certain degree of professionalism. I am proud to be part of the species of investigative journalists. Tonight we honour colleagues who really made a difference this year. Thanks to this award, our once endangered species lives strong in Southern Africa."

New investigation

Banda echoes Mbombe's pride. "But it will make my work in my country only harder, as more people will know I'm an investigative journalist." Banda has already been arrested four times in connection with his work. "The cash prize is very welcome. 2000 Euro in my currency is a lot of money. I will use some of the money to partly finance my new investigation on how porous our borders are. Many Pakistani come into Malawi, and spread over the continent from there, virtually uncontrolled."

Anton Harber, professor of journalism and media studies at the Johannesburg University of Witwatersrand (Wits), said the jury had a very tough job. Harber is member of the jury, and handed over the award. "Although there were only nine entries, the quality was very high. We took into consideration the big differences in circumstances under which journalists work in this region. Some have a well supplied newsroom behind them, while others work independently and take great risks without any legal protection."

The award is named after Zimbabwean former radio journalist and retired judge John Oliver Manyarara, who now lives in Namibia. Manyarara has always been hailed as a champion in media ethics and

one of the true defenders of freedom of press in Southern Africa. In 1991, he co-wrote the Windhoek declaration on press freedom, and in 1992 co-founded the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

Enhance skills

MISA initiated the award in 2001 in co-operation with NiZA to honour its founder. This year the Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR), the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) and Wits University joined in. This will result in the further institutionalisation of the award, MISA regional director Kaitira Kandjii said. "After five years, the award has finally become adult".

The award ceremony was this year incorporated into the Wits' Investigative Journalism Conference, held from the 28th until the 30th of September. Kandjii expressed the intention to hold the ceremony in Johannesburg every year from now on. Previously, the award ceremony was always organised in the country of the winner, but that resulted in little attention. "In South Africa all the media are present, we can use the infrastructure of Wits and IAJ, and it is easy to bring people in", Kandjii said.

He once again stressed the importance of the award. According to him investigative journalism is a very specialised branch in the profession, and deserves some special attention. Kandjii is confident the John Manyarara Award will enhance the investigative skills in the whole Southern African region.

Previous winners are:

2001: Lynne Altenroxel, *The Star* - South Africa; for revealing large scale bribery in South African's health sector.

2002: Conrad Nyamutata, *Daily News* - Zimbabwe; for courageous research into the 11 September 2001 bombattack on opposition party MDC's office, carried out

by Zimbabwe's police and intelligence service.

2003: Mzilikazi wa Afrika and Jessica Bezuidenhout, *Sunday Times* - South Africa; for their exposé on a fraudulent 335 million Rand Komatiland forest deal, which led to the cancellation of the deal.

2004: Jacques Pauw, Special Assignment - South Africa; for a documentary on a major heroin trafficking route through Eastern and Southern Africa.

2005: Hilary Mboobe, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation - Malawi; for a radio report on 'Kupimbira practice': girls being sold out into marriages to alleviate family debts or poverty.

By Demian van der Reijden.

Van der Reijden is a freelance journalist who recently worked for six months at The Star in Johannesburg through NiZA's Media Program for young professional journalists.

(demian_vd_reijden@journalist.com)

Links:

MISA: www.misa.org

FAIR: www.fairreporters.org

University of Witwatersrand:
www.wits.ac.za

IAJ: www.iaj.org.za

Optimism about Africa's blogosphere

There are more than 54 million blogs worldwide but only a small percentage of blogs derive from Africa . However, there is no need for Africans to be pessimistic about the future of a possible 'African blogosphere'. That became clear during the first ever Digital Citizen Indaba (DCI) at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa.

During the Indaba, bloggers and journalists came together to demonstrate

to the rest of the world “that Africa is more than a passive observer in the global village”, Colin Daniels, the DCI’s coordinator, says. There is a rise in popularity among African blog portals and some African bloggers receive daily global attention.

With the help of blogs many people get the opportunity to express themselves freely and access to information becomes easier. Daniels argues that the Internet “gives us the power to challenge society’s injustices and allows ordinary citizens to question the actions and policies of their governments.”

For example, blog portals such as www.blogafrica.com and www.kenyaunlimited.com are converting into successful start off points for a look at African blogs. And local blogs such as the one from Kangni Alem from Togo (www.togopages.net/blog) (in French) and Oluniyi David Ajao from Ghana (www.davidajao.com/blog) are examples of what Africans can do with their blogs. Both Alem and Ajao describe their daily life and comment on politics in their country.



Colin Daniels, photo by Paul Greenway, HANA.

Political news

Politics.za (www.politics.za.net) is totally dedicated to commenting on political news in South Africa . This weblog is updated daily and just like Zimpundit (<http://zimpundit.blogspot.com/>) describes politics. Zimpundit writes about politics in Zimbabwe and this, like for other countries

in Africa without press freedom, shows that blogging can be a form of activism that strives to improve human rights and work towards the establishment of stable democracies.

DCI therefore spent a number of presentations on online activism. During one of the workshops, Kenyan Online activist Ory Okolloh from the website www.kenyapundit.com argued that blogs “will never cause a revolution in Africa but can make a considerable contribution to micro activism in small communities”. This micro activism can be “as simple as holding traditional medium accountable for its mistakes”. One of Okolloh’s projects is the blog www.mzalendo.com, ‘the eye on Kenyan parliament’. This blog addresses the lack of proper coverage on politics and accountability of MPs in parliament.

Problems

However, while Okolloh has been able to start this blog, many Africans are still struggling. The biggest problems that Africa faces, seems to be the same as ten years ago: there is no money, no access to information and reporters don’t have the right skills to work with new media and ICT’s.

Although these problems are still rife, the DCI initiative demonstrated a more positive line of thought about blogging. Like Ethan Zuckerman from the blogsite www.globalvoices.com, points out in his welcome address: “These barriers can be overcome. We need to use this piece of fascinating technology to give every African a voice”.

Peter Verweij, senior professor at the School of Journalism in Utrecht, the Netherlands, was sponsored by NiZA to give new media workshops about blogging to ensure journalists improve their skills and knowledge about ICT’s. He is also optimistic about new media in Africa and in *Open Source*, the daily conference

newspaper, he revealed that “the issue of how expensive ICT’s are will be overcome by the sheer force of enthusiasm and hunger for the technology. While this yearning for ICT knowledge might be slowed down by the cost factor, southern African journalists from Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia are really catching up with ICT’s and will overcome this handicap through their passion and willingness to learn and use digital technology”.



*Peter Verweij,
Photo by Paul Greenway, HANA.*

Blocked blogs

Besides all the optimistic comments made by many delegates, an ongoing problem for some unfortunate African countries is the lack of press freedom. Reporters without Borders keeps an eye on which blogs have been blocked. Blogs like Ethiopundit (www.ethiopundit.blogspot.com) and Weichegud (www.weichegud.blogspot.com) are full with commentary on political and economical developments in Ethiopia and have been blocked for longer periods. Reporters without Borders suggests that it

is the Ethiopian government who stops the blogs from being accessed.

It therefore seems that Africans still have a long way to go before they can drive at full speed on the information super highway, but luckily some widely-spread pioneers have started to slowly but surely make Africa visible in the digital world of blogging.

By Elvira van Noort.

Van Noort is a Master student in Media Studies at Rhodes University and a freelance correspondent based in Grahamstown, South Africa .

Links:

Digital Citizen Indaba: <http://dci.ru.ac.za/>

South Africa heeds protests delays pre-publication censorship Bill

The South African media industry has been outraged by a SA government proposal to amend regulatory laws applicable to films and publications, mainly books, which the industry claimed would result in pre-publication censorship of certain editorial material in the print and broadcast media.

The proposal was contained in the Films and Publications Amendment Bill 2006 which was sprung on the industry without warning or consultation. In 1962, SA's apartheid government, which applied extensive censorship of books, films and artworks, exempted SA newspapers and magazines and later broadcasters from the Films and Publications Act under which censorship was carried out. In return, the print and broadcast industries set up self-regulatory bodies, currently the Press Ombudsman and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, which deal with professional and ethical breaches of their codes of conduct.

The exemptions were honoured by the first democratically elected government of the African National Congress in 1994 but in July this year, the Home Affairs Ministry published the amendment which proposed removal of the exemptions.

Inroads

The SA National Editors' Forum (SANEF), the SA Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-SA), the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), Print Media SA (PMSA, the country's publishers' association) and other bodies concerned with media protested vigorously. They emphasised that the amendment would make deep inroads into media freedom, that were unconstitutional and would impose practical constraints that would be highly disruptive of the industry if it attempted to comply with them.

PMSA, representing more than 600 newspapers and magazines, and the other organisations submitted strongly worded protests to the Home Affairs Ministry. The Films and Publications Act classifies non-news publications to ensure that "adult material" is screened from the youth or from those who do not want to be confronted with it by restricting sales to either adult shops or in reserved areas of book shops. "Adult" films are required to be shown only to audiences above a specified age.

Protests

Though ostensibly intended to curb the production of child pornography and to protect children from exposure to it, the amendment considerably widened the category of material to be classified beyond that of pornography to the extent that political content could be affected. It declared that material such as "propaganda for war" and "incitement to violence" would require classification.

Journalists protested that this would mean an inability to publish President George Bush's statements justifying the US going to war against Iraq without it being classified in advance. News about violent protests that have occurred in SA over the failure of service delivery by municipalities might also be subject to classification before publication.

Objections

Other objections were raised against the banning of legal representation and appeals to the High Court when applicants appear before the Films and Publications Board.

An appeal was made by MISA-SA and FXI directly to President Thabo Mbeki to delay the Bill so that comprehensive consultation between the ministry and the industry could take place. Nine days before the Bill was to be voted on in Parliament, the Cabinet agreed to delay the Bill for consultation and it is now to be presented in 2007.

The industry is unsure whether this is a stratagem to quietly bury the Bill or whether it will indeed be proceeded with next year. But there have been clear indications that, in addition to the outrage expressed in SA, the government has been "under pressure", according to the Home Affairs Deputy Minister Malusi Gigaba, as a result of adverse publicity in influential newspapers in Europe and America and international interventions from media organisations such as the International Press Institute which sent letters of protest to Mbeki.

By Raymond Louw.

Louw (rlouw@sn.apc.org) is World Press Freedom Committee Africa Representative & Editor & Publisher of Southern Africa Report.

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## **New Media Program Manager:**

### **‘There is no time to mourn’**

**Recently appointed Gérard Bueters, 53, the new manager of NiZA’s Media and Freedom of Expression Programme shares his background, his vision on the Media Program and the current turbulent times.**

When he started his job at NiZA, Bueters expected a period of getting to know the staff, the projects and the partner organisations. Instead, after his visit to the Highway Africa conference in Grahamstown in South Africa, it was hands-on right away. The Dutch government’s recent rejection to fund NiZA for the next four years is Bueter’s first challenge in his month-old position.

“I didn’t see this coming, so it was a huge change in a short time,” says Bueters in NiZA’s office in Amsterdam. “One positive side to it is that I can look at the situation with a clear mind. I didn’t come into this organisation with any expectations, but I did enter this building with loads of energy and motivation. I want to make sure we won’t be this dependent on one big donor in future.”

### **More funds**

Bueters says they are now contemplating the consequences of the Dutch government’s decision. “Lots of partners ask us what the rebuffal of the subsidy means for them. We have money for our partners till the end of 2008 but NiZA doesn’t stop after this date. We will have to look for more funds. I think we should mainly look into funding for separate projects instead of funding for the whole media programme.”

According to Bueters, this is also a time for reflection. “I do think NiZA has been in a comfortable position too long. When you have enough money to continue your projects, you sometimes don’t make time

to shift your focus and to look to what is necessary in future. We cover a lot of different issues and we might need to narrow this down. People need to know what NiZA stands for. We need to find a niche. We are doing too much at the same time.”

Bueters also feels this turn in cash flow will make NiZA more critical towards its partners. “We must check what they are doing and if this fits our new focus. We need to see them more as business partners that have to achieve certain targets. Of course, they will still get time to develop. Targets should work towards motivating and not paralysing an organisation. There must be space to make mistakes and to correct them.”

### **New plans**

Bueters thinks it is a plus for the Media Program he is a journalist himself. He studied Sociology, Mass-Communication and Cinematography and has over 20 years of working experience in both written and audiovisual journalism. “I am the only journalist in the media department. I know what having this profession means and what we, as NiZA, can contribute to journalism in Southern Africa.”

Asked about the change in focus of the programme, Bueters names two things: broadcasting and new media. “I have a background in broadcasting and I notice that we can do more on that issue. We can use moving images to offer more people access to information. If there are elections and you are in a remote area of a country, you could, for example, use your cell phone to film and send this to the capital where these images can be spread around the rest of the country and the world. And we have seen in South Africa that soaps bearing a message, for example, of the danger of HIV/aids, are popular. We have to look into this power of combing entertainment and information.”

His view on new media is that NiZA doesn't pay enough attention to IT and ICT. "The developments in this sector go very fast and we kind of shy away from it. I feel there are opportunities and possibilities to do more in this sector. We need to check if our partners are busy with using new media and how we can assist them. There is big potential in web casting, video casting and pod casting, also to achieve the goals of the media programme: to strengthen the media in southern Africa so they can play a role in the democratic process and people can create their own opinion."

But for now, Bueters is taking it day by day. "There is so much going on because of the rejection of the funding. We need to go on, and focus. We need to communicate to the public what we do and why our organisation is important. Our organisation should have one image so future donors know what we stand for. We have a lot of challenges lying ahead. We don't have time to mourn."

*By Elles van Gelder.*

*Van Gelder (elles@ellesvangelder.nl) is a freelance journalist. She is the editor of MediaNews and in the past worked for The Big Issue South Africa through NiZA's Media Program for young professional journalist.*

**Links:**

You can find Bueters' C.V. on: <http://www.mediateam.nl/index.htm> (Click bottom button C.V.)

