



Media News

Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa

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World Newspaper Congress in Africa not undisputed

by *Elvira van Noort*

The World Newspaper Congress (WNC) and the World Editors Forum (WEF) will for the first time in history, be staged in Africa. More than 1,500 publishers, chief editors and senior newspaper executives from 90 countries are expected in Cape Town this week. For many African newspaper publishers and editors, this presents an opportunity to network and to receive updates on newspaper business strategies.

Invited by the Newspaper Association of South Africa (NASA), the 60th WNC and 14th WEF will commence side-by-side on the 3rd of June until the 7th in the Cape Town International Convention Centre. The Congress will bear the theme 'Shaping the future of the newspaper' and concentrates on business strategies, while the Editors Forum will focus on newsroom issues under the theme 'Quality journalism in the digital age'. The event is organised by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN)

While the Congress is being welcomed in Africa, certain media organisations, such as the South African Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), wonder whether African media and media

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NGO's will be fairly represented. AIP says the fee of the conference means that some smaller independent African publishers and editors can't afford to attend. Therefore, they won't be able to place their issues on the agenda, share their expertise in grassroots publishing, or benefit

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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from the broader global networking and technology exchanges.

"It is a pity, because WAN's 'Shaping the Future of Newspapers' is a fantastic initiative, with practical and immensely useful resources that have the potential to revolutionise the way that many smaller African publishers do business," says AIP president Justin Arenstein.



Delegates

The participants list on the Congress website indicates that there are roughly 270 delegates from Africa, of which about 150 are from South Africa. Of these South African delegates, only four are independent grassroots publishers.

Larry Kilman, director of communications of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) says his non-profit organisation has sponsored over 130 editors from all over Africa so they can go to the conference. Also, much of the proceedings will be available on WAN's African Press Network (www.rap21.org) and on the editor's weblog (www.editorsweblog.org).

"I don't think it [the fee] is a problem. We can't make everybody happy but as a non-profit organisation we have made a large effort in securing that many Africans can attend the Congress," says Kilman. WAN offers special fees. Instead of 1950 Euros, African national newspapers pay 1100 Euros and regional, local or community newspapers pay 550 Euros. The fee for retired editors and academics within schools of journalism is 370 Euros.

Reduced rates

AIP president Justin Arenstein applauds WAN's willingness to offer reduced rates for African delegates, but points out that even these reduced

rates are out of the reach of most smaller publishers.

"The reduced rates have seen a flood of registrations from Africa's larger conglomerate media, including their so-called 'community' papers. But the reduced rates are unfortunately still prohibitive for the independent publishers - and as a result there are currently just four grassroots newspapers at the event to represent literally hundreds of publications," he says.

However, Trevor Ncube, the president of NASA, considers the fees fair. "We told them [WAN] the rates are not affordable for Africans so they brought it down, I consider it a fair rate. And you can see that most news companies have now subscribed to the Congress".

Press Freedom Round Table

Not only editors and publishers visit the Congress, African press freedom organisations will also be present. Zoe Titus, specialist on Media Freedom Monitoring at the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) argues that the organisations finally have their house in order; indicating that the small number of delegates will be sufficient. "A number of major African press freedom and freedom of expression organisations have now formed a network called the Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO). We can assure that our issues will be heard because of our joint campaigns and sharing of experiences."

What will be of great interest to NAFEO and all other African participants is the Press Freedom Round Table. This Round Table discusses press freedom issues in Africa with well-known speakers such as media analyst Fackson Banda from Zambia, and editor and publisher Raymond Louw from South Africa.

Louw will discuss how the South African government is tearing down press freedom. He argues that new laws are impinging on press freedom in South Africa. In the May issue of the South African publication *The Media*, Louw explains that laws that prohibit the "[in]clusion

of journalists from certain court cases; the censoring by bodyguards of photographs of the president and deputy president; and the escalation of hostile commentary on media practice by politicians and high-placed state officials” are proof of the government’s intolerance to press freedom.

It is not any different in other African states as Louw monitored government action against journalists in Africa over three months, from March to June 2006, and “came up with 18 instances of repression and /or assault or detention affecting some 66 journalists in 14 countries”.

Erosion in media

AIP will meanwhile seek to use the Round Table to highlight the erosion in media diversity and pluralism in southern Africa caused by the rapid expansion of larger conglomerate publishers across the region. "The larger and more globalised companies are expanding aggressively, using their massive resources to take over or close down independent publications. They are also centralising production, streamlining reporting, and cutting costs. The result is fewer and fewer journalists writing for more and more generic publications. In fact, they use so much of the same copy that, if you cover the masthead, it is often difficult to tell the difference between publications or even which city you are in," says Arenstein.

Besides the Press Freedom Round Table, African delegates should take note of the 2007 Innovations in Newspapers Global Report, which will be presented at the Congress and deals with the newspapers’ changing newsrooms from print-only to multimedia. Also, general manager of South Africa’s biggest daily newspaper the Daily Sun, Fergus Sampson, will discuss how his paper became such a success story.

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Links

For info on the conference: <http://www.wan-press.org/>.

For a list of participant:

<http://www.capetown2007.co.za/participants.php>

Review of NiZA’s Media Sector Plan

Newsflash

A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the 2005 - 2008 Media Sector Plan of NiZA's Media programme is currently taking place. The MTR is part of the contractual agreement between NiZA and funder PSO. It aims to assess to what extent the programme so far has been effective to contribute to the formulated objectives. It also aims to develop recommendations for the remaining programme period and thereafter. Conducted by Bangani Ngeleza and Helge Rönning, the report will be ready by the end of May. More on the findings of the MTR will be available in our next issue of MediaNews.

New press bill might shrink freedom of expression

by Elma Doeleman

In a media conference organised last March in Maputo by MISA-Mozambique, NiZA’s media programme partner, relations between the state and the media were discussed in several working groups. Currently there’s a proposal for a new press bill under debate in parliament, which might limit the freedom of expression and access to information in the country. Journalists at the conference discussed how to increase the impact of the media and guarantee the citizen’s right to independent information.

In the workshop about ‘the role of the media in the democratisation process’, Fernando Gonçalves from the weekly Savana defended that the media should play a decisive and

coherent role in the various phases of an electoral process to avoid irregularities by political parties. He recalled the document signed by several media in 2003 that designs a code of conduct for the media during electoral processes. The main principles are professionalism, impartiality, integrity and independence from whatever political force.



Gil Lauriciano, journalist and researcher at the Institute for Foreign Relations (ISRI) commented that this might be easier said than done as the elites that are behind political parties finance the run for power of the candidates. But the media do not escape this pattern: there are also small groups that invest in some candidates during election time. This could hamper the independence of the journalists involved.

Free rides

On the same subject, Miguel de Brito of the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa (EISA) referred to the free rides journalists are offered by politicians to accompany them in their campaigns. This makes them vulnerable to manipulation. But it is a reality that most media don't have sufficient transport for their workers. Therefore, Gonçalves brought up the idea to introduce a "trust fund" for the media, analogous to the one that exists for political parties. In this way, the distortions brought about by material dependencies could be avoided.

Tomas Vieira Mário, president of MISA-Mozambique, agreed with the idea of institutionalising a media fund, especially in this period where the country will see three consecutive elections. "Which information organ can cope with three consecutive elections? This will affect the media greatly. That's why it is just as relevant to finance the media as the political candidates." Whether such a fund should be managed by the government or the National Electoral Commission is an issue for further debate.

Juridical trials

Another hot issue was the debate on the presence of the media at juridical trials. The Bill proposes to prohibit the publication of image and sound from court cases. In long-term democracies this is normal procedure, as the defendants are supposed to be not guilty until proven otherwise, and so their identity should be protected. But in a situation such as Mozambique, the public's right to information and to actually testify to what's happening in court, especially in cases of high public interest, might prevail to the interest of the defendant.



The journalists agreed that the text of the bill conflicts with two constitutional articles guaranteeing the right to information. Tomas Vieira Mário remarked that the Mozambican Bar Association had recently taken the same position in a meeting with the parliamentary commission for juridical questions, human rights and legality. Moreover, Mário stated, the

High Court recently determined that journalistic reporting on court cases, including direct transmission on radio and TV, is not legally restricted. This statement was part of a recent ruling by the High Court, in which the prison terms of the murderers of journalist Carlos Cardoso were confirmed. The Cardoso trial, that took place in 2003 in a heavily guarded tent at the precinct of Maputo's maximum security prison, was fully transmitted live on national radio and television.



Press card

In another session at the occasion of 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, journalists gathered at the office of their union, the SNJ, to continue discussions on the state of media freedom. The proposed introduction of a professional press card to be issued by the government's Information Office provoked a heated debate. Some journalists fear that this will give Government, which since independence has always been controlled by the Frelimo party, unlimited power to decide at will who can work as a journalist and who not.

One participant went as far as to compare this situation to Zimbabwe. However, another line of thought defended that it was indeed necessary in Mozambique to define who is effectively a journalist. Fernando Lima, journalist and president of the board of Mediacoop, complained that "nowadays we have people that in the morning are consultants, in the afternoon they are

journalists and at midnight they have another profession". But he admitted that the introduction of a press card alone would not solve the problem of the "intruders and adventurers". Augusto Carvalho of the weekly Domingo tried to put into perspective the fear of Frelimo domination. "It is the perception of domination that perpetuates the domination of a party or a group. The Frelimo monster does not exist", he claimed.

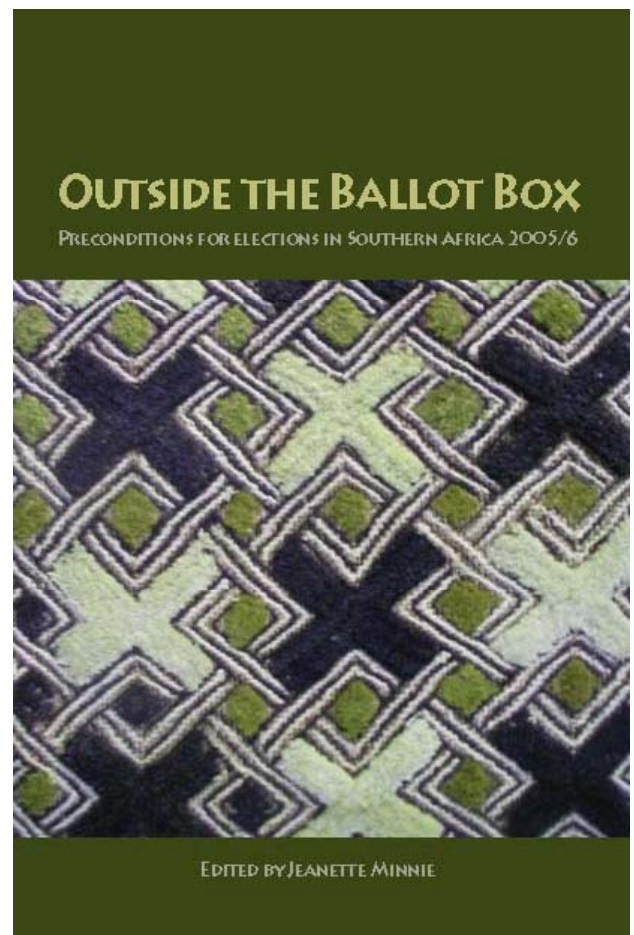
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Links

MISA Mozambique: <http://www.misa.org/>

Second edition of Outside the Ballot Box

News



Fourteen authors from nine African and two European countries discuss the state of democratisation in Southern Africa in the second edition of *Outside the Ballot Box*. They focus on controversial subjects such as strategies for change in Zimbabwe, the growth of poverty, shack dweller protest in South Africa and the disposition of liberation movements as governments. Others engage with the role, strengths and weaknesses of civil society as agents of democratic progress, and the broader or lesser extent of political and civil space in various countries.

The book, published by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and with NiZA as one of the financiers, forms part of a regional initiative known as Pre-conditions for Elections Programme in Southern Africa (PEPSA) which seeks to campaign for an enabling environment for the consolidation of democracy in the region, rather than the fixation on the holding of elections (read more about PEPSA in MediaNews 23 on <http://www.niza.nl/medianews>)

The book has already been launched in South Africa and Zambia and will be launched in Angola next week. The electronic version of the book can be downloaded from: <http://www.misa.org/ballotbox.html>

Natural resources in DRC: Media and CSOs join hands

by Christian Kuijstermans

Recently, NiZA joined representatives of media and civil society organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to finalise a joint strategy to improve information dissemination and circulation of the country's natural resources at local, national and international levels.

The meeting was the result of a process of consultation with different partner organisations in the DRC, which included an earlier meeting in April 2006 (see Medianews May 2006). At the meeting in Kinshasa, three radio networks were present, as well as NiZA's media programme

partners Radio Maendeleo and Journaliste en Danger. As a result of collaboration with NiZA's programme on natural resource exploitation, a further three organisations, with experience in research and lobby, and advocacy on natural resource exploitation, attended.

The common factor between the participating organisations was the shared belief that information dissemination and circulation is at the heart of, on the one hand, informing and supporting civic education of the general population, and on the other hand, successful campaigning and lobbying activities towards local, national and international governments and institutions as well as companies involved in pillaging the DRC's natural wealth.



Radio

Based on a concept document prepared by NiZA, the meeting finalised a strategy document. This document identified that efforts were needed to strengthen communication capacities of both civil society organisations as well as community radio stations. In the end, this strategy is all about allowing the Congolese population to participate and benefit from governance of the DRC's wealth.

In addition, the strategy foresees a joint development of radio programmes on natural resource governance and related issues, holding discussions at local and national levels, implementing joint research, and preparing information for lobbying and campaigning at local, national and international levels.

Online database

The meeting also stressed that it was essential to link lobbying and campaigning in the field of natural resources at an international level. NiZA is for instance, a member of the International Fatal Transaction campaign - a campaign that aims to hold governments and international companies accountable to foresee in equitable exploitation and international trade of natural resources. Fatal Transactions also strives for the development and implementation of international guidelines for natural resource governance. This work was seen as an essential extension and ingredient of the strategy in order to support the work implemented by organisations on the ground.



The end result of the meeting was a prepared strategy supported by NiZA and the aforementioned group of partner organisations in the DRC. In the meantime, however, there has already been a concrete activity implemented within the framework of this strategy.

Last year April, at the meeting in Lubumbashi, it was decided that an online database with information generated by organisations part of the Congolese natural resource network, should be established. This should serve as an information point for not only these organisations, but also for local, national and international media as well as international organisations working on the issue of governance of natural resources.

This website has been established after two training workshops held in December 2006 in Kinshasa and may 2007 in Lubumbashi. With it, a first step has been taken in anticipation of the start of the implementation of the developed strategy.

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Links

Website fatal transactions :

<http://www.fataltransactions.org>

Database on natural resources in DRC :

<http://www.ppprdc.net>

Rádio Ecclésia via internet

Newsflash

Rádio Ecclésia – the catholic radio station that is one of our NiZA media programme partners in Angola – is celebrating it's 10th anniversary after the re-opening up of the station in 1997.

To mark this anniversary Ecclésia has started web-casting on a trial basis.

By doing so the radio station has expanded its signal from capital Luanda and surroundings – where the broadcast via FM 97.5 MHz - to the whole country and even the world, provided one has access to the needed new technologies. The station asks all who speak Portuguese to please visit their site – www.radioecclesia.org - and provide them with feedback on the quality of receipt as well as on their programmes.



Programmes are being web casted 24 hours a day on a daily basis. Feedback can be given via the site or alternatively can be

send to the stations' executive director, Mr. Gustavo Silva, on jogustavo@hotmail.com.

MISA re-opens office in Angola

by Luísa Rogério

At the beginning of May, MISA re-opened its offices in Angola. The organisation starts with an ambitious and full agenda: from recovering the confidence lost during the period in which the organisation was inactive in Angola, to the creation of provincial offices and fortifying the press and press freedom.

According to journalist Pedro Neto, the new chairman of the MISA-Angola Council of Governors, the projects in the period 2007/2008 will primarily focus on contributing – in conjunction with other professional associations – to the process of regulating the Press Law approved in May 2006. Another goal of the new MISA Angola is to establish and reinforce partnerships with the government by way of the Ministry of Social Communication and respective professional associations in the sector.

Looking at the organisational structure, the institution intends to prioritise the creation of provincial or regional MISA-Angola nuclei to ensure that the aims of the organisation – the defence of press freedom and the right to free expression – can be achieved throughout the whole country.

Says Neto: “We continue to receive reports of circumstances in which journalists see their working materials confiscated or they are personally threatened with arrest for simply trying to carry out their work with impartiality. But, although we acknowledge there is still some way to go, it is our understanding that Luanda has been gaining ground in terms of individual liberties, something that has not been the case in other provinces in the country.”

Fortifying the press

MISA Angola also wants to encourage the creation of a regional press, as well as fortifying the private press sector in the country and “the strengthening of institutional capacity to improve the work of our organisation in a more

professional manner”, he added. Neto says the need to train MISA-Angola administrative staff to carry out their tasks in order to correspond to the requirements imposed by donors, is central among the activities programmed.

MISA-Angola was suspended by the Regional Council of Governors in Windhoek for a period of five years due to non-conductive behaviour. The ban was officially lifted? in April this year. According to Neto, recovering the confidence lost during the period in which the organization was inactive in Angola with journalists, professional organisations in the country and donors, should constitute the basis for all immediate MISA action locally.

Neto also hopes to work together with the government, other media organisations and civil society. Neto: “We feel that together we stand to gain more than if we are divided”. With this posture they portend to construct strong connections with all those who believe that freedom of the press and freedom of expression constitute fundamental elements of life in a democracy.

Major challenge

Despite their positive ambitions, they do face a major challenge though: “We need to dismantle the idea that was constructed over the years that MISA is purely an organisation of political opposition to the government. This couldn’t be further from the truth and is unfounded”.

The challenge notwithstanding, Neto reiterates the idea that MISA “is an important partner in ongoing efforts to construct and improve preconditions?for a credible democracy in Southern Africa and Angola”

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Citizen journalism: Media power to the people

by Thessa Bos

Media around the world are increasingly using contributions from ordinary members of the public to complement their own reporting – with a more democratic media landscape as a result. Can citizen journalism do the same for Southern Africa?

A cellphone snapshot of the stabbed Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, civilian recordings of the London bombings and, more recently, the infamous execution video of Saddam Hussein are all examples of citizens contributing to mainstream media. The days that citizens were mere consumers of the news are over. Nowadays, the man in the street often contributes – and sometimes, even makes the news.



Internet, cellphones and other new technologies have dramatically changed the worldwide media landscape. They have also opened the door to a new kind of reporting: citizen journalism. In *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis describe this concept as the act of citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information". This could be anything from taking eye-witness pictures with your cellphone and posting comments on mainstream news sites, to keeping a personal blog or

contributing to a full-fledged "participatory" news site.

Lively debate

The rise of citizen journalism has sparked a lively debate. Proponents say it gives people that are excluded or misrepresented by the media a chance to make themselves heard. The traditional media has always been driven from the top-down, whereas citizen journalism has a grass-roots approach to journalism, and is therefore often deemed to be more democratic.

Others, such as Vincent Maher, former director of the New Media Lab at Rhodes University, take a more critical stand. In 2005, Maher published a paper on his personal blog, titled 'Citizen Journalism is Dead', in which he criticises, among other things, the ethics of citizen journalism. Unlike the Old Media journalists, writes Maher, citizen journalists do not have an institutional code of ethics, no formalised training, no formal accountability towards a boss, nor are they monitored via industry bodies and associations. As a result, "bloggers have no incentive to check the accuracy of their writing and no standards against which to maintain their own accuracy," concludes Maher.

However, Peter Verweij, lecturer in new media at the School of Journalism in The Netherlands, feels it is not citizen journalism, but the debate on its legitimacy, that is dead. "We should stop comparing citizen journalism to journalism and instead, accept citizen journalism as a new form of information supply that can be an important tool to boost public debate."

Two years after publishing his paper, Vincent Maher says the hype that predicted the New Media and citizen journalism would end the hegemony of the Old Media, has largely dissolved. Instead, citizen journalism is used more and more as a complementary tool. "The *Mail & Guardian online*, for example, has made user-generated content an important part of its strategy," says Maher, who became Africa's

first online newspaper's strategist in December 2006.



Lack of infrastructure

Last month, South Africa witnessed the launch of myvideo.co.za, a video sharing site that encourages would-be journalists to film newsworthy video content on a camcorder or mobile phone. One month after its release, the site hosts some 350 videos, ranging from a montage of the Cosmopolitan Lingerie Shoot to the outcome of a high-profile court case. Although CEO Rowan Polovin is “happy with some of the content so far”, it is very early to judge the success of the initiative.

Launched in January 2006, Media group Johnnic Communications’ (Johncom) citizen journalism project, reporter.co.za, has been around the block longer. “With reporter.co.za we aimed to break down barriers and encourage media participation,” says editor of Johncom’s digital media division, Juliette Saunders. “The website covers everything from entertainment to social issues, but also features subjects that the mainstream media do not touch – such as Zimbabwe.”

A year after its launch, reporter.co.za has gathered a group of over 6000 regular contributors, the majority of whom are from black communities, says Saunders, refuting the general assumption that only affluent white people participate. “However, the low percentage of people who have access to the Internet immediately limits our audience,” says Saunders.

Strong supplement

Despite the lack of large scale (and affordable) Internet access in southern Africa, NiZA’s media programme manager Gerard Bueters believes citizen media will become a strong supplement to the mainstream media and that organisations such as NiZA can play a role to make this happen in the region. Firstly, Bueters believes a great opportunity lies in training. “By equipping people with citizen journalism skills, teaching them how to gather news and how to adapt it for public use, you will offer people an instrument to communicate and exchange relevant information.”

Secondly, Bueters also suggests that media NGOs should take up the challenge to increase Internet access and assist in creating other forms of media access. For example, in Zimbabwe, Short Wave Radio Africa has set up an SMS news delivery service with the support of NiZA, beating the censors by using the mobile phone network to get news to the people. In February 2007, two months after its launch, Short Wave Radio had already built up an address database of 2000 mobile phone numbers. With around a hundred requests to be added to the service daily, it is growing rapidly.



One could conclude that with its relative lack of Internet infrastructure, southern Africa has some very large hurdles to overcome before citizen journalism can truly start playing the positive role it has already taken in other parts of the

world. However, according to Peter Verweij, Short Wave Radio exemplifies that people should not underestimate the technology that is already embedded in the region. “The mobile phone, ‘the revolution of Africa’, is already prevalent on the continent and is a key instrument for citizen media participation. The critical success factor is to make people aware of the fact they can use it as such.”

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Links

Website based on user generated content:

www.reporter.co.za

Website with video’s: www.myvideo.co.za

Website of Vincent Maher:

<http://vincentmaher.com/mit/>

Mail & Guardian: www.mg.co.za/

Short Wave Radio Africa:

<http://www.swradioafrica.com/>

‘Until I see change, I’ll keep writing about poverty’

by Teun Hofmeijer

A year ago, a group of 20 journalists from different Southern African countries set out to the impoverished Malawian countryside. In two weeks of intensive training and writing several stories, they covered rural and poverty-related issues and improved their reporting skills on children and women. MediaNews looks at how they implemented their new skills during the past 12 months.

The intensive course titled the NSJ ‘rural and poverty reporting course’ started two years ago in a bid to make marginalised citizens more visible and to give them a voice. “At the moment, decision-makers often exclude them from their policies,” says Ransford Antwi, training manager at NSJ. “By teaching participants different writing techniques and angles in which stories

can be told, the coverage of poverty issues is being enriched”.

“We teach the reporters about poverty, its causes and effects”, continues the NSJ training manager. “During the two weeks we emphasise on the inter-relatedness of gender, HIV/Aids, trade and poverty. In addition, the participants need to get their way around in interpreting sources, such as the Human Development Index or the Global Aids Report.”

The aim of the course is to remind participants and their governments about the Millennium Development Goals and to stimulate them to reach them. Antwi: “We try to enable them to assess how far or near they are to achieving the poverty eradication dimensions as they approach the 2015 deadline.”

Eye opener

“I don’t have a background in poverty”, says South African-based freelance reporter and participant of the 2006 course, Sharon Davis. “So it wasn’t an area that I was familiar with.” The course was an eye-opener for her. She went to several families; some affected by tuberculosis, others by HIV/Aids. “It’s so much more useful to actually be in the field, to hear about their problems and the way they have to deal with their illness. For instance, the problem that a sick person faces when they need to reach a hospital, when there is no transport available.”

Davis says that after taking the course she writes more responsibly about poverty, gender or HIV/Aids related issues. She also thinks that she has learned to write in a different way. “In writing regular news articles, you tend to go straight to writing down the facts. But during the course, we were more focussed on observing before getting to the facts. We did this in order to draw a picture or a scene at the beginning of an article and so pulling a reader into the story.”

“I myself come from a poor village in the countryside”, says participant Thom Khanje, reporter for the Malawi Broadcasting

Corporation. “You see, when you are living there, you take most of the issues for granted. But when I moved to the city and saw how the people were living there, I thought to myself: ‘wow, the people in my village are suffering! We are poor.’” He then made a vow to himself to not stop writing about poverty until he sees change in the lives of his people.

As a self-confessed poverty reporter, the training was useful to him because of the practical knowledge – he learned for example, to write on one topic from different angles - and sharing several experiences - not only with the trainers, but also among the participants. “That is what is missing after you have finished the course”, Khanje mentions. “I would have liked to come together with the same group after some time to see how everybody has incorporated the experiences in their daily work.”

In 2007, the poverty course will be held in Swaziland. Interested students can apply online or download application forms from the NSJ Trust website at www.nsjtraining.org.

To enter the course, journalists need to be working in the media for at least three years. They have to write a motivation letter, submit their curriculum vitae and exhibit some of their work. The NSJ then makes an equal selection on gender and the country the applicants come from. NiZA sponsors the course, so the participants don't have to pay a fee.

Teun Hofmeijer(thofmeijer@hotmail.com) is a participant in NiZA's media programme for young journalists. He is doing a traineeship at MISA in Windhoek, Namibia.

Links

NSJ: www.nsjtraining.org

Report on the International Conference on Community Radio in Angola

Newsflash

NiZA media programme partner ADRA (Acção para o Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente) has

published a report covering all contributions and interventions made during the International Conference on Community Radio.

The Conference was held in Luanda September 20 and 21 last year and featured - amongst others - international experts in the field sharing the experiences with community radio in Mozambique, - Guinee Bissau and Brazil and also discussing the role of civil society and governments in Portuguese speaking countries to promote community radio in order to develop their countries.

The report has been published in Portuguese and a copy can be obtained from the ADRA Centre for Information and Documentation via cid.adra@angonet.org

MediaNews has published an article on the Conference in our November newsletter, MN 23 (<http://www.niza.nl/docs/200703022133594649.pdf>)

Creeping media censorship in South Africa

Opinion

by Jeanette Minnie

The Film and Publications Act has recently stirred lively debate in South Africa. Media and media organisations in South Africa have uttered critique the last few weeks on the country's Film and Publications Act. According to the ANC, the bill is meant to protect children against pornography. But, writes Jeanette Minnie, it curtails the country's freedom of expression.

Was it a sincere desire to protect South African children against pornography or a desire to impose political control over the content of media - or both - that recently caused the ruling ANC party to propose a Bill that introduces pre-publication censorship over newspapers and the broadcast and online media in the country? Is it possible that the ANC's members of parliament and even the ANC ministers in the executive -

who approved the Bill last year - did not understand the full implications of the draft legislation they were promoting? Should one even accept such a dangerous level of naivety and as an acceptable excuse?

If so, this is no longer the case. If the ANC uses its majority to pass this legislation after the public hearings conducted during May, they will deliberately be doing so after having been extensively informed about the wider human rights and political implications of their actions.



Sexual nature

The Bill calls for the scrapping of a provision that has for 40 years exempted South African newspapers and broadcasters from the ambit of the Act – that is even during the administration of the former Apartheid government. The Act imposes pre-publication classification of magazines and films, particularly those of a sexual and/or violent nature, and can be used to ban or prohibit such materials. This was indeed the case in Apartheid South Africa before 1994, when the Act was used as an extensive tool of political censorship against famous writers and political activists such as Steve Biko, André Brink and Nadine Gordimer.

In recent weeks, a range of media associations and even parliament's own legal advisors informed the relevant parliamentary portfolio committee that the proposed amendments to the country's Film and Publications Act are more

than likely in breach of the country's constitution. Included among these were the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA, chapter South Africa), the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), as well as the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF).

The ANC says it never meant to impose pre-publication censorship of the media, it only meant to protect children against "pornography". It is quite obvious from the public hearings that many in the ANC equate any portrayals of full or semi-nudity with pornography, and make no distinction between the two. The Act also bans any so-called incitement to violence or war.

Submit news

Various submissions to parliament pointed out that the media would have to submit all news reports containing descriptions of sexual assault and rape to a classification committee before publication. "If one has further regard to the definition of 'sexual conduct', all articles on sexual intercourse, regardless as to whether they are educational, artistic or literary works, will have to be submitted. The same difficulty will arise in respect of any news report, photograph or article dealing with, or depicting, declarations of war, violent demonstrations, violent incidents or civil unrest, because of the requirement that descriptions of 'propaganda for war' or 'incitement to imminent violence' will have to be submitted to the publications committee for classification," the SANEF submission said.

It is immensely frustrating that none of this debate is new. In the mid 1990's freedom of expression activists, including myself, explained many of these issues in radio and television debates, as well as to the ANC and other political parties in verbal submissions to parliament when the Film and Publications Act was in the process of being amended. Ironically, the purpose then was to transform it from a tool of political repression and censorship into an internationally acceptable system of age

restrictions and classification to protect children and sensitive audiences.



We knew from international historical precedent, however, that after winning power, even the most principled and freedom-loving political movements and individuals eventually end up resenting the media. Given the watchdog role of the media in a democracy, it is inevitable that media and government relations will be strained. Governments, therefore, can never be trusted to regulate the media. Freedom of expression should never be subjected to governmental approval. A luta continua!

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