



# Media News

Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa

MediaNews 26, September 2007/ Quarterly newsletter of NiZA 's Media Programme

## NiZA transforms into campaign organisation

By Fenneke Hulshoff Pol

**In September 2006, NiZA received news that the Ministry for Development Cooperation rejected a substantial subsidy for the period 2007-2010. NiZA's appeal that followed this decision was also rejected. Consequently, NiZA has gone through a drastic reorganisation in the past months.**

Based on the arguments of the Ministry and discussions with experts in the Netherlands, a decision was taken by the NiZA Board to transform NiZA into a campaigning organisation. The new NiZA will focus on economic equality and will campaign against exploitation of Africa in an international context. Campaigns will take place in the Netherlands and Europe and will be linked to activities and campaigns in Africa.

The theme of the first (series of) campaigns, which will start in the fall of 2007, will be natural resources. As a consequence of the afore-mentioned, NiZA had to downsize its staff component considerably.

In the new NiZA a small team remains to round off the three existing thematic programmes (Media and Freedom of Expression, Economic Empowerment and

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Human Rights) in their current form.

*Fenneke Hulshoff Pol (Fenneke.Hulshoff@Niza.NL) is senior programme officer at the NiZA's programmes department.*

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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## **Insult Laws in Africa and what prospects for their elimination**

By Raymond Louw

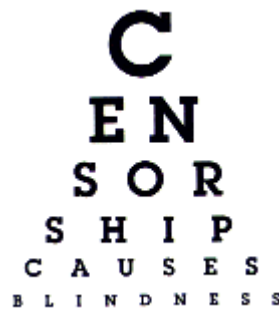
**Insult laws are in the limelight again following the adoption of the Declaration of Table Mountain recently at the World Association of Newspapers Conference in Cape Town. The Declaration called on African nations to eliminate insult and criminal defamation laws, which have been used for decades to prevent people from being informed about the conduct of their leaders.**

Insult and criminal defamation laws protect presidents, premiers, parliamentarians and, depending on the country, state officials such as the heads of the police and defense forces, among other institutions, from scrutiny of their conduct by journalists. These laws provide for jail and other sentences on journalists, who, according to the World Press Freedom Committee's "Hiding from the People", are deemed to have committed insult, offence, outrage, contempt or disrespect to these untouchable elites.



They have been used ruthlessly in many African countries against journalists to prevent them from publishing stories about corruption, abuse of power, mal-administration, authoritarian misconduct, human rights abuses and other undemocratic practices in high places.

They are on the statute books of 48 of the 53 African countries. The irony of issuing the Declaration in Cape Town lies in the fact that South Africa does not have "insult" laws, though criminal defamation is a common law offence. However, it has not been used for some 30 years.



### **Threat**

These laws are sparingly used in southern Africa where they tend to be used as a threat hanging over journalists. The exception is the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe, both of which have harassed, beaten, detained or jailed 53 journalists and broadcasters in the first five months of this year on "insult" or related offences.

This shows the vigor with which the authorities use these laws. The survey, which extends to other countries in Africa, disclosed the figure of 229 journalists, broadcasters, on-line editors and bloggers who had been harassed and/or detained and/or jailed in those months in 27 other African countries.

### **Hide the truth**

The wording of "insult" laws varies from country to country but the intent is always clear -- to hide the truth from people about the conduct of their rulers. Many of these laws emanated from the colonial powers, a kind of legacy of the divine rights of kings. Many of these former colonial countries still retain them at home but

claim there is no need for repeal because they are not used.

The countries in Africa using them take their cue from their former colonial masters but ignore the fact that they have fallen into disuse. When calls are made for these laws to be scrapped, African governments merely point to their former colonial masters and point out that they still retain them.

What hopes of success are there for the Declaration? The history of the treatment of the media in Africa raises doubts. A recent example of African states refusing to acknowledge the importance of the media or the necessity of it having freedom to operate has emerged in the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is part of the campaign by African states to show that they can rise above the squalor of the continent and lift themselves by their own boot straps without hand-outs.

### **Startling omission**

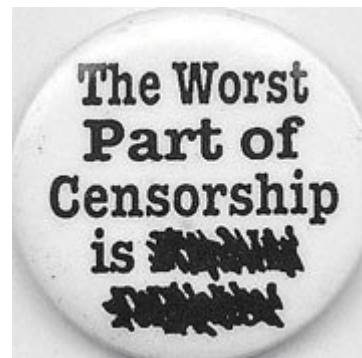
The APRM is part of Nepad (New Partnership for African Development) and is a process whereby states submit themselves voluntarily to introspection designed for them to identify their faults in spheres of governance and social development and then submit to a review of that assessment by their peers in the African Union.

The criteria for the political “good governance” section includes the adoption of clear codes of good governance, maintaining an accountable, efficient and effective civil service, ensuring effective functioning of parliaments and other accountability institutions and ensuring the independence of the judicial system.

These are all worthy requirements for a positive assessment of “good governance” but the startling omission is the necessity for the fostering of a free and independent

media in a country which journalists - and, indeed, many high court judges - insist is key to a flourishing democracy.

When the APRM rules were being drawn up, this requirement was part of the “good governance” assessment, but on the eve of publication it mysteriously disappeared with no explanation. Journalists and political observers believe that its removal was dictated by the fact that AU officials realised that the 48 countries of Africa with “insult” and criminal defamation laws would not “pass” the “good governance” test with that requirement in place.



So now, how many countries in the AU will take heed of the Declaration and scrap their “insult” laws? The Declaration goes further: it calls on the African Union to insert in the APRM criteria the requirement for a free and independent Press. The prospects of success for the Declaration's campaign against “insult” and criminal defamation will be judged by the speed with which the AU implements that call.

*Louw(rlouw@sn.apc.org) is Editor and Publisher of the weekly current affairs briefing newsletter, Southern Africa Report, and Africa Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee.*

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### **Highway Africa Conference coming up**

*Newsflash*

It's that time of the year again! From 10 to 12 September delegates will venture out to Rhodes University in Grahamstown for the annual Highway Africa (HA) conference.

More than 500 delegates from across the globe will attend the conference to discuss issues relating to Internet governance, Information and communications technologies, policy and media for democracy.



Check [www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za](http://www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za) for this year's program.

In the two days before HA, the Digital Citizen Indaba will take place in the same venue which will gather African digital citizens - bloggers, netactivists, digital rebels, hacktivists, media professionals and academics - who use new media to deepen democracy and development. More on this event on: <http://dci.ru.ac.za/>

More on citizen journalism in MediaNews 25: Citizen journalism: Media power to the people

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## Power to investigative journalism

By Elles van Gelder

Journalists will venture out to Johannesburg next week to learn the tricks of the trade of investigative journalism. For the third time the Power Reporting Workshop will offer intensive training in investigative journalism skills.

From September 3-5 about 150 African journalists from community and mainstream media will attend the training. The event is organised by the Wits

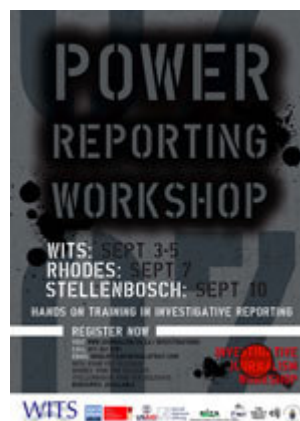
Investigative Journalism Workshop (IJW) and partly sponsored by NiZA.

Participation will be open to any journalist, with those from the commercial media being charged a reasonable rate, and those from smaller and community media receiving sponsorship for their participation.

In addition, for the first time, Portuguese and French-speaking journalists can join with at least twelve French and twelve Portuguese-speaking journalists joining the Power Reporting Workshop. It was NiZA's idea to sponsor translation so as to enable their participation.

## Little resources needed

'We want to create enthusiasm for investigative journalism,' says organiser Birgit Schwarz from the WITS campus in Johannesburg. 'What you always hear from journalists is that they don't have the time or the resources to do investigations. We want to show that it is possible with little resources. Investigations shouldn't necessarily be big. There is exciting research to do in communities as well. Besides, if you are organised, you can do an investigation alongside your daily work.'



She names the South African Daily Dispatch that published an article about Frere Hospital in East London as an example of recent research by a local

newspaper. The newspaper reported that 2000 babies were stillborn at the hospital's maternity ward over the past 14 years and that 43 newborn babies had died in July.

‘We want to encourage such investigations,’ says Schwarz. ‘And make sure that the work is of high standard and ethics because that is still lacking,’ she continues.

To create a high standard, there is a lot of attention needed for practical skills such as enhancing knowledge of ICTs and CAR (Computer Assisted Research), analysing local and provincial government budgets and tenders, and how to read company profit and loss accounts. The latter two are useful while researching corruption.



*Birgit Schwarz*

### **Inspire**

Schwarz says many African journalists work far too close to the authorities in their country who exert pressure on them or try to manipulate or buy them. ‘There are newspapers with no other means of transport than those that government provides. Or there is a lack of awareness that if a company hands out presents, like for example Nike giving away shoes, at a press conference, undermines your independence as a journalist. Those are things we would like to address.’

Besides teaching the journalist ethics and practical skills, there are also speeches by well-known investigative journalists to inspire the journalists attending. One of the main speakers is Sheila Coronel, founder of the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and the current director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Reporting at Columbia University. She will deliver a keynote speech on how the PCIJ managed to topple corrupt Philippine president Joseph Estrada.

Another highlight is German journalist Günter Wallraf, renowned for his undercover journalism. He has created new identities for himself to experience what it is to be an alcoholic, a worker in a chemicals factory and an editor of a big German newspaper. World wide fame came with him posing as Turkish immigrant Ali whose experiences as a Muslim immigrant in the German society were shocking.

The Power Reporting Workshop aims to give journalists in other provinces in South Africa the chance to learn investigative skills as well. Therefore one day workshops will be held on September 7 in Grahamstown and on September 11 in Stellenbosch.

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### **Links**

**Power Reporting Workshop:**  
<http://www.journalism.co.za/ijw/power-reporting-workshop-2007-3.html>

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## **Media Council of Zimbabwe launched**

*Newsflash*

The Media Council of Zimbabwe was launched in June. Representatives from media organisations converged in Harare and elected an eleven-member board to oversee the self-preservation of professionalism in the media fraternity by their own representatives from the media and members of the public.

The board is in contrast to the Media and Information Commission imposed on journalists by the government's infamous Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

For more information read Zimbabwe's Media to establish self regulatory media council in MediaNews 25

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## **Positive Mid-Term Review Media Programme 2005 - 2008**

By Fenneke Hulshoff Pol

**In April and May this year organisational development specialist Bangani Ngeleza and media professor Helge Ronning successfully carried out a Mid-Term Review of the Media Programme (2005-2008). The Review is fairly positive about the Media Programmes' achievements thus far.**

The main purpose of the Mid-Term Review was to assess to what extent the Media programme has been effective to contribute to the objectives and purposes it had identified for itself, and to develop recommendations for the remaining programme period and thereafter.

The Review consisted of in-depth interviews with a number of partners in the programme, a workshop with all its Zimbabwean partners, a questionnaire for

all partners that could not be met with in person, and individual interviews and a workshop with the NiZA programme staff in Amsterdam.

Main conclusions of the MTR are that NiZA's Media Programme is – unlike many other development funding agencies - willing to provide 'seed' support to initiatives and organisations that are in their early phases existing and not yet well established. This has provided several organisations and initiatives the opportunity to grow and learn and many Media Programme supported activities have served as a catalyst for attracting other funding.

Next to this the Review found that NiZA's Media Programme has been willing to go into difficult areas (both geographical and political) and sensitive issues. Furthermore, it found that NiZA is not only a donor, but also committed to collaboration and co-operation through discussions and visits; and NiZA's Media Programme is known for its substantial knowledge of the Southern African region and its media situation.

## **Recommendations**

The most important recommendations are that NiZA's Media Programme should continue to exist on the basis of the current sector plan as this plan caters to a need and meets its objectives; That co-ordination between the three thematic programmes within NiZA should be improved; That partnerships should be reviewed to ensure on-going adequate ownership and to ensure that the Programme's role as developer and catalyst is applied where it is most needed.

Next to this, the MTR advised the Media Programme to facilitate annual meetings between organisations that are contributing to the same objective to explore opportunities for synergies.

Another recommendation was that a strategy for linking programming in the South to advocacy and lobbying in the North should be developed.

Unfortunately, the conclusions of the Mid-Term Review are overshadowed by the Ministry for Development Cooperation's rejection of NiZA's subsidy in September last year. As a result, NiZA had to go through a substantial reorganisation and will become a campaigning organisation as per 1 September 2007.

The organisational changes are such that not all recommendations of the Mid-Term Review can be fully implemented during the left over implementation period of the Media Sector Plan. Nevertheless, NiZA will finalise the Media Sector Plan implementation period as per the plan and will seek to incorporate some of the activities within its newly chosen focus and strategy.

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## **Convergence and multi-media at National Arts Festival**

By Elvira van Noort

**'We are blurring the lines between different media newsrooms and pushing cross-media to the limit,' says Peter Verweij, professor of online journalism at the School of Journalism in Utrecht, in the Netherlands. Verweij's comments follows a visit to the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University in South Africa to run an exciting project on integrating TV, radio, print and photography.**

The convergence project, of which NiZA was one of the sponsors, was held during the Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

Together with eight Highway Africa News Agency (HANA) journalists, two Dutch students and cross-media lecturer John Driedonks from the Dutch School of Journalism, Verweij produced a Festival Weblog incorporating newsroom convergence and multi-media publishing. Newsroom convergence integrates formerly separate media into one newsroom to encourage cross-media cooperation. Within this converged newsroom the different media, staffs and media technologies (from online video to newspaper workflow systems) are combined. This means that all staff equally work for the newspaper, radio, television and online site or whichever media platform is involved.



*At work in the news room*

For years, Cue newspaper, Cue Online, Cue TV, Cue Radio and Cue Pix [pictures], were all produced separately at Rhodes during the Festival. Each Cue platform ran their own show with their own goals, production systems, and business models. But this year, the Festival Weblog aimed to bring these media together onto one platform. Reporters of the Festival Weblog used text, audio, video and photographs to publish about the Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

Converging, or integrating, into one weblog can culminate in better journalism because it integrates the best of each: the emotion of TV and radio combined with in-depth reporting from the newspaper.

### **Worldwide trend**

Although the initiative follows a worldwide trend in the newspaper industry to converge newsrooms, convergence is relatively new for the African media landscape with South African media such as the Mail & Guardian, Die Burger, and the Sunday Times only last year including convergence in their agenda's and incorporating multi-media as part of their daily routine.

The Festival Weblog was able to produce 56 stories in just 10 days and more than half of these used multi-media. The experience proved valuable for some of the HANA-journalists.

'Most important was the picking up of new skills, like TV; I've never done that before,' said Ugandan David Musoke, editor of the Rwandan newspaper New Times and HANA correspondent.

Levi Kabwato, a fellow HANA correspondent and journalist for the Malawian newspaper The Daily Times said that he would share the new skills learnt. 'My presence here will also benefit the many colleagues and friends I left in Malawi as I'll have a chance of imparting the knowledge I'm gaining here. For African journalism, I think that's awesome.'



*Performance at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival*

### **Changed mindset**

To enable an atmosphere of equality between the media platforms, a reporter within a converged newsroom needs to be aware that they are not just working for a newspaper but also for online, TV and radio.

While the earlier attitudes of the existing Cue platforms in Grahamstown towards the new Festival Weblog were not very positive, their mindset changed within three days. Once journalists and editors noticed that the Weblog offers additional space for their content for a wider audience, they started to visit the Weblog newsroom on a more regular basis.

According to Verweij it is important for journalists in a converged newsroom to understand the sharp distinction between the terms 're-purposing' and 'pre-purposing' news articles. Re-purposing is re-using existing content from for example TV or radio on a separate platform - such as the Weblog - while pre-purposing means a joint project of a multi-skilled team of reporters to cover a certain topic. The latter includes combined diary meetings and planning a story within a multi-media team. This is where a converged newsrooms' power lies: by working together and combining the best of all platforms.

Only two stories were pre-purposed in the final days of the Festival Weblog because this type of story takes longer to prepare and produce since all media platforms are involved. However, once the journalists accepted working together within different media platforms - which started to happen after five days or so - it became easier and quicker to combine their content onto the Weblog.

### **Way forward**

In the future, the Weblog will consider to have a multi-media editor who concentrates on convergence and tries to link stories together at each platform.





*Performance at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival*

Other possibilities include incorporating cellphones as a media platform. This is not only to spread the Weblog's content to a wider audience, but to also attract citizen journalists who can submit pictures and stories.

'Based on my experiences during this project, my outlook for the future of this convergence project is optimistic,' comments Verweij. 'All students and lecturers had a great interest in the convergence project and fully co-operated. There is an atmosphere of understanding which contributes to establishing a firm basis to build on for the following year.'

He adds that 'the Weblog can in the future include more pre-purposed stories, generate advertising revenue, look at adopting a simple but effective workflow system, and establish a converged newsroom culture within the School of Journalism so the students can learn about the newsrooms of the future.'

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## Links

### The Festival Weblog:

<http://www.schoolvoorjournalistiek.com/festivalblog/>

### Convergence website:

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

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## Global ethics conference in Zambia

### Newsflash

The International Conference on Global Ethics for the Media in the 21st Century took place from August 30-September 1 at the Mulungushi International Conference Center in Lusaka. The conference was organised by The Kasoma Media Foundation.

As media plays an increasingly crucial role in politics, in armed conflicts, and in people's daily lives, a range of complex ethical issues emerge. These issues include the quality and independence of news reporting; the use of news media for propagandistic purposes; the potential of the media for conflict resolution and for cross-cultural antagonism; and the role of media in strengthening democratic processes. Such burning issues demand a process of global reflection, writes the foundation.

### More information on:

<http://www.kasomamediafoundation.com/activities.html>

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## An African Treaty on Freedom of Expression?

By Jeanette Minnie

**Major violations of the right to freedom of expression and media freedom continue unabated in many African**

**countries. African media organisations have therefore started campaigning for the adoption of a Treaty or Protocol on Freedom of Expression in Africa.**

As the ninth Summit of the African Union took place in Accra, Ghana in early July, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and a number of African media organisations noted in a statement that since 2001, 13 journalists were languishing in jail in Ethiopia while 15 others were being held incommunicado in Eritrea. A journalist was also being held incommunicado in Gambia since July 2006.

The Eritrean journalists have been held since September 2001 when opposition leaders called for democratic reforms, which were widely cited in the press.

The journalists in Ethiopia have been in custody since November 2005 when the government went on a rampage, raiding newspaper offices and issuing lists of wanted editors and writers in a crackdown against dissenters following disputed general elections six months earlier.

Four journalists have been assassinated in Africa so far this year – one each in Somalia, Ghana, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo – and another three have died in crossfire covering the conflict in Somalia. This is only the tip of the iceberg and hundreds more cases of media freedom violations are recorded annually on the continent.

This is despite the existence of an African Charter on Human and People's Rights since 1981 (which in Article 9 includes the rights of access to information and freedom of expression) and the adoption of a Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa by the African Commission for Peoples and Human Rights (ACPHR) in 2002.

## Campaign

For these reasons African NGO's who promote and defend media freedom and freedom of expression have started campaigning for the adoption of a legally binding and enforceable Treaty or Protocol on Freedom of Expression in Africa. The call was made on June 26 in Accra at a two day conference on Strengthening Freedom of Expression in Africa organised by Centre for Research, Education and Development of Rights in Africa and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) with the support of various Open Society foundations.



The call was supported by 24 organisations in attendance, including the National Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa in Zimbabwe (MISA-Zimbabwe), The African Editors Forum (TAEF), the Network of African Freedom of Expression Organisations (NAFEO), the IFJ and the Central African Editors Forum.

Justifying the need for a Treaty, the conference communiqué noted that the ACPHR's Declaration of Freedom of Expression Principles was not legally binding and limited in scope because it conceived of freedom of expression mainly in terms of media freedom. It should be updated to include other elements of freedom of expression such as political participation and academic freedom.

## **Ambitious undertaking**

The communiqué also said that Article 9 of the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights rested on a weak foundation in that it provided “an escape window for governments opposed to freedom of expression and freedom of the press” by limiting these rights to the confines of national laws that often undermined these rights, instead of protecting them.

In a formal resolution it called on the relevant organs of the African Union to work with African Civil Society, and especially freedom of expression organizations, to submit an additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on Freedom of Expression to the 2008 Summit of the African Union. This will be a worthy but ambitious undertaking.

It usually takes many years of campaigning and lobbying before inter-governmental organisations accede to requests for the adoption of legally binding protocols. Nevertheless, the sooner the campaign begins in earnest, the better.

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## **Economic reporting on Africa: Still a boys club**

By Elles van Gelder

**The African business world is still largely male-dominated and successful businesswomen are hardly visible in economic reporting, says NiZA media programme partner GenderLinks. According to the organisation, the media must transform. ‘Journalists should see gender as a struggle just as they did with apartheid.’**

Last month, Genderlinks, an organisation that promotes gender equality in and through the media, hosted a workshop on gender and economic reporting in Johannesburg at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism. Eighteen journalists, half male and half female, were trained in the Business Unusual Workshop in being conscious of gender in their economic reporting.



*The Business Unusual Workshop*

According to GenderLinks director Colleen Lowe Morna, there is a big necessity to do so. ‘If you look at economic reporting, only 8% of the sources used in newspapers are females. And often, if an article focuses on women it is often superficial. They are hardly quoted as experts or analysts. Media don’t really make an effort to contact female sources. They just want quick soundbites.’ Lowe Morna also says media often categorises women as wives or sisters instead of in their own integrity of profession, and write superficial articles about females.

## **Glass ceiling**

One of the main reasons for the exclusion of females in reporting is that the media is still male- dominated. The study “Glass Ceiling Two: An Audit of Women and Men in South African newsrooms” from GenderLinks found that with 45% women in newsrooms there is a progressive move towards achieving gender balance. In 1995 this figure was 33%. Women however, occupy less than 30% of top management



posts and constitute one out of three senior managers in newsrooms.



*During the workshop, journalists wrote about women in mining*

The research also showed that male journalists dominate in all of the hard beats, such as politics, economics, investigative reporting, crime and sport, in which opportunities for promotion are better, while women journalists predominate in the “soft” entertainment, education and general reporting categories.

Belinda Anderson, journalist at FINweek, says it is quite noticeable how few women there still are working in the financial markets. ‘Often one might go to a company results presentation and see many dark suits and smell the aftershave, but see only a sprinkling of female analysts and fund managers. But, there does seem to be more women than there used to be when I started as a journalist about eight years ago.’

And according to Ferial Haffajee, editor at South African weekly newspaper the Mail&Guardian, women that do break through the glass ceiling, often just ‘step through the splinters and go on as if it’s business as usual’, she stated in the GenderLinks workshop handbook.

### **Thorough reporting**

Another reason for the invisibility of females in economic reporting is, according to GenderLinks, that a lot of

women work in the informal sector which isn’t well covered.

‘Gender conscious reporting should be seen as thorough reporting that covers all segments of the population,’ says Lowe Morna. ‘The media doesn’t see gender as its struggle. But why shouldn’t they? What if the media wouldn’t have seen apartheid as its struggle?’

Andersson of FIN24 doesn’t believe that her gender is influencing her choice of stories. ‘Story choice is influenced more by what would make a good investment angle, and what I believe readers will be interested in.’ She also doesn’t search female sources per se. ‘But if I do find a good female fund manager or analyst, I would most certainly make use of them for comment.’



*During the workshop, journalists wrote about women in construction*

While she views gender as a struggle, Andersson thinks the danger of seeking out female-specific stories is that one almost brings in a bias, instead of moving on beyond gender and seeing people as people from the outset. ‘Although I don’t disagree that there’s a place for reporting on women’s issues, and of course one should find male and female sources, I believe that in doing a good job and creating a reputation for yourself as a fair, objective and hard-working journalist, one does more to break down perceptions of gender inferiority than one would if seen as ‘harping’ on about women’s rights.’

Siziba Nompu (34) works for the SABC as a news researcher and followed the GenderLinks workshop in Johannesburg. She does feel she should try to make a change. ‘This workshop made me realise there isn’t enough attention for women in the media and that they are often represented light-heartedly. I am black and I am a woman and black females should be profiled more in the media. But I do feel that if you work for a big organisation, such as the SABC, it is difficult to make a change. Fortunately, my boss is progressive.’



*Siziba Nompu, journalist at SABC*

The workshop has already been offered in Zambia, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and Tanzania and this year focuses on South Africa, Swaziland and Namibia. Interested journalists can click [here](#) or contact [admin@genderlinks.org.za](mailto:admin@genderlinks.org.za)

*Elles van Gelder (www.ellesvangelder.com) is a freelance journalist based in South Africa. She is the editor of MediaNews and works for a daily newspaper, several magazines and the website www.africanews.com.*

## **Links**

[www.genderlinks.co.za](http://www.genderlinks.co.za)

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## **Successful workshop on the transformation of national media in DRC**

By Virginia Setshedi

**Recently, Journalist en Danger (JED), an NGO based in Kinshasa-DRC, facilitated a workshop that looked at the transformation of national radio and television, which is owned and fully controlled by the state. Virginia Setshedi of the South African media organisation FXI, joined the workshop titled Atelier National.**

The main objective for the workshop was to uphold principles of freedom of expression in the country and in Africa. This would be achieved by initiatives that look at setting up norms that create space for the existence of an independent public broadcaster. The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) was invited to this workshop and FXI’s experience as far as the Public Broadcasting Services is concerned, contributed to the discussions at the workshop.

In his welcoming statement, JED President Donat M’Baya Tshimanga said the transformation of the National Radio and Television in the DRC is imperative to bring change. He further argued that media has to play an important role in the next election and that public media is important for social justice, promotion of human rights as well as protection of journalists.

The workshop speakers and participants came from different sectors and therefore had different understandings of the initiative of transforming the existing broadcaster. Some speakers and participants were from the government departments and others worked for the existing National Radio and Television.



## **Public versus state**

The first speaker was the Minister of Communications in the DRC. In his speech Toussaint Tshilombo Send pointed out that as the country is undergoing reconstruction broadly, DRC also needs the help of the media for reconstruction. He further suggested that the media needs to adopt the new content in an objective way and in the same breath; they should reflect quality of information. In his statement he pointed out that the country has to modernise its infrastructure and allow for independent production of information that is balanced and accessible to the whole population at large.

Boubacar Diarra from UNESCO emphasised the point that state and public are not synonyms and that the public broadcaster has a duty to make a difference to the public by trying to close the gap that cannot even be filled by commercial media.

During the discussions at the workshop, a number of participants raised issues about the consequences of the transformation. The main concerns were based on the fact that the transformation process might reduce jobs as a large number of the current employees viewed the JED initiative as a threat to their wellbeing.

## **Zambia and South Africa**

The representative from MISA Zambia, Brian Muletambo Lingela, shared the Zambian experience in transforming their media. In his presentation he pointed out clearly that the guiding principles that were followed during the process was Article 6 of the Union Declaration, promoting freedom of expression. The public broadcaster was to be governed by the board of directors and be protected from interference. The main objective was to make sure that ZNBC is removed from government control and to achieve that, MISA engaged in repealing other

legislations that served as stumbling blocks.

The South African situation regarding the public broadcaster was also used as a case study in the workshop. The South African Constitution provides all citizens with the right to freely express themselves and right to access information. Beyond that there were legislations that were put in place that backed the existence and the character of the public broadcasting service. In the South African case there is the Broadcasting Act, the ICASA Act and the Electronic Communications Act that regulates broadcasting.

As a South African at that workshop, I pointed out that the process of transformation begins and can end, but the process of monitoring continues as long as the broadcasting service exists. The South African broadcaster was transformed from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster and that transformation process has ended. However, the monitoring of the public broadcaster guarding that it maintains its independence, is a continuous and a non-ending process.

## **Challenges**

The challenges faced by the transformation process initiated by JED for the Congolese is vast. The historical background of the DRC and the impact that background has on people's lives contributes to what people would be willing to change or not to change in their country. The question about the authorities' political willingness to transform the national or state broadcaster was raised several times.

Another disturbing concern was the fact that there are continuous threats to press freedom and freedom of expression within the country. There is a growing sense of censorship and even self – censorship among the journalists. Some of the employees of the national radio and

television admitted that the situation in their workplace is not conducive for them to exercise their right as journalists to tell stories as they should be told. A study conducted for JED pointed out how journalists - by law - are regarded as working for the state and are thus referred to as civil servants. Journalists' remunerations based on patriotism and those close to the president, are always appointed as managers.

In conclusion, the situation in the DRC's broadcaster definitely needs attention. The initiative by JED is important and highly necessary. The question about the political will is crucial because the transformation process will not succeed without the will and commitment of those who are in power. The process should also involve all civil society organisations within the country as JED will not be able to take this forward without them. Solidarity among the region and the continent is an important aspect in this whole process.

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### **Links**

FXI: <http://www.fxi.org.za/>

JED: <http://www.jed-afrique.org/en/>

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