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concept gives marginalised groups the opportunity to form partnerships with existing community and/or mainstream radio to get their voices heard on issues pertinent to their development.

DTR goes a step further than traditional community radio operations and attempts to bring on board those with no access. The concept, more popularly known as “radio listening clubs”, has evolved dramatically and progressed to a more dynamic process of interaction between rural women and policy makers.

Essentially, the interaction constitutes an ongoing dialogue that also includes input in the form of support and resources from NGOs and the wider development aid community.

Although DTR clubs may broadcast to local community radio stations, they mainly target policy makers and development actors who would typically not be easy to interact with, and who would most likely reside in the capital city.

DTR seeks to take local voices and perspectives further, and creates a sense of media ownership somewhat by proxy.

The issues aired on weekly broadcasts are first discussed, determined and agreed-upon by the communities, and not by the radio station producers and executives.

Jennifer Sibanda, of FAMW-Zimbabwe has been quoted as saying that DTR training programmes encourage women to become agents of change, and equip them with skills to help alleviate poverty, as well

as to address issues such as the marginalisation of and discrimination against women.

Despite the growth of television and the Internet in Africa, radio remains the most advantageous medium due to affordability, widespread use and coverage for the majority of Africans. One radio for instance, can serve the needs of DTR clubs ranging from 10 to 80, with ease. In rural Africa, a DTR club goes a long way to bring women to the bargaining table of development processes and serves as the space for collective discussion and interaction on development perspectives.

DTR helps to resolve the problem of isolation faced by many living in rural areas. Further, the fact that it serves the needs of all – literate and non-literate – is proof of its usability.

### DTR in Sierra Leone

As a result of the successes and popularity of DTR in Southern Africa, FAMW identified the Forum of Conscience (FOC) as the best suited NGO for collaboration on setting up a DTR project in Sierra Leone.

In light of the efforts to bring about lasting peace, the DTR set out to focus on reconstruction efforts as well as provide a channel through which women would voice their views on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process.

Currently, the DTR project in Sierra Leone has a presence in 30 communities in the north, the south and the eastern provinces. The groups range from 30 to 80 members of varying ages – approximately 14 to 60.

# The unbalanced media diet



*Pauliina Shilongo*

*Pat Made*



**By Anthea Garman**

**W**hen you look at the Southern African “media diet” served up for Africans to consume, you discover some curious things about the differential reporting on men and women.

Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa commissioned the Media Monitoring Project to do a major study of media production in the 12 SADC countries in the month of September 2002.

The resulting study is called the Gender Media Baseline Study and can be accessed online at [www.genderlinks.org.za](http://www.genderlinks.org.za)

According to Pat Made, Africa Director of Inter Press News Agency, and Pauliina Shilongo, a lecturer at the Namibian Polytechnic Media Technology Department, 25 000 news items were looked at. Of the 340 print and electronic production outlets in the 12 countries, 117 were surveyed. This included private, public, community and independent media. Foreign agency copy was also surveyed where it appeared in local media.

“We looked at the entire media diet,” said Made. The intention was to build a team across the region with the skills to undertake media monitoring and to compile enough material to use as a gender-awareness and advocacy tool.

What were the findings?  
♦ Of sources used, 83% were male, 17% female, with prominence given to men in authority. “There is a strong parallel here to the global study done in the year 2000 in 71 countries,” Made said.

♦ When women do appear they tend to be in the age group 25 to 40 and then they become “virtually invisible... before 24 they have no voice and after 50 they

have no voice”, Made said.

♦ Women carry their “private identity” more than men, in other words women are identified as mothers and wives more often in public than men. The statistics are 11% of women and 2% of men identified in this way in the reports covered.

♦ Who speaks on what issues? Men overwhelmingly speak for all humans even when gender violence becomes an issue. Only on the issue of gender equality do women get to represent themselves more often than men.

♦ How do female parliamentarians fare? Although 18% of members of parliament in the region are women (31% in SA) they get quoted only 8% of the time.

Other findings according to Shilongo are that:

- ♦ Gender equality is not considered newsworthy.
- ♦ Men’s voices dominate in all hard news categories.
- ♦ The number of women reporters in the region is declining.
- ♦ Subtle stereotypes abound and so do blatant sexist stereotypes.
- ♦ “Gender blind” reporting continues with assumptions that men and women are affected equally by policy decisions, etc.

In subsequent discussions with editors, Made said, it becomes clear that they do not have editorial policies to guide gender-sensitive coverage. Training and retraining has become crucial in newsrooms.

“Who are the newsmakers? We need a paradigm shift to answer that question,” she concluded.

*See [www.genderlinks.org.za](http://www.genderlinks.org.za) for a wealth of further information and training materials which deal with the multiple facets of gendered reporting in Africa.*

The club members comprise mainly widows, some amputees and others affected by the war in such ways as sexual slavery, loss of children and family.

The DTR offers a space for interaction and healing of wounds inflicted during and after the war. The women find strength in being a part of a group that helps to address the wounds that afflict them and where they can collectively focus on poverty alleviation priorities.

FOC acts as the overall facilitator and serves the DTR groups through a DTR co-ordinator. She receives the recorded audiotapes from the groups; types in a "manifest" which contains basic information on date, group, summary of discussion. She then hands them over to Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) for editing and broadcasting.

### Add new media

While the technical conversion processes are not necessary to understand or interpret content that is read, heard or seen in digital form, it is important to state that bringing in new technologies has implications and there are always nagging debates as to the added value of conversions from analogue to digital, particularly in the absence of adequate infrastructure. The why? how? and to what end?, are questions that have helped shape the process of introducing new technologies into the DTR in Sierra Leone.

The focus of the Reuters Digital Vision Fellowship was to explore the potential for new technologies in expanding the notion of DTR to a wider audience. If

the voices of rural women can be put on a national policy-making table, can new technologies provide a channel beyond the borders for a global audience? Can content generated by women in the provinces of Sierra Leone be shared with other global communities? Consultations with the Forum of Conscience led to a visit in December 2002 to carry out a needs assessment.

The visit established that the DTR has brought in many changes in the lives of the members. By having a voice on SLBS, they have been assisted in implementing a number of major priority areas, such as establishing market centres; training and sensitisation on HIV/Aids and other health care concerns; discussions on human rights issues; police brutality; and gender-based violence.

A number of the groups are implementing skills-enhancement programmes on textile design, soap making etc. Some are marketing their products in the larger towns. Some groups have an adult literacy programme in process.

One of the biggest hurdles facing both the FOC team and the DTR communities is the lack of communications facilities. Mobile telephony is beginning to take root, and although available in the bigger towns, is yet to reach the rural areas. The most efficient form of communication between FOC and the DTR communities was through radio broadcasts.

At the time of the visit, Internet access for the majority was through private cyber cafés in Freetown. There was only one Internet service provider, Sierratel. The speed was generally excruciatingly slow, expen-

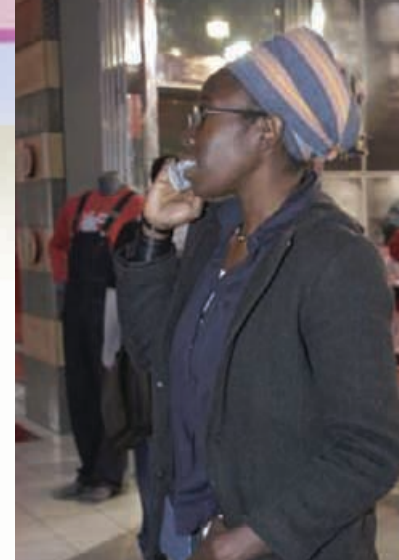
sive and therefore prohibitive to the majority of interested users. Frequent power outages made computer use prohibitive as well. FOC has computers in all its offices, but has no Internet access and experiences frequent power outages.

Based on the needs expressed by the DTR women and further discussions with FOC, the agreed upon areas for collaboration and intervention by the Digital Vision Programme were to embark on digitisation of the audio and video content broadcast by the women and the testimonies for archiving and for dissemination. Further, a website would be developed to reflect the work of the DTR, FOC and to host the digitised audios.

By enabling the women's voices to go beyond traditional radio, the project is expected to link the concerns, hopes and aspirations of the DTR to the wider media and development aid community that may want to partner with the women.

An online record of their survival and progress will be available and updated constantly to reflect the changes and impact of the DTR on their lives.

*Mercy Wambui is a Communications Officer at the UN Economic Commission for Africa where her brief relates to ICTs. mwambui@uneca.org Additional information can be found on the DTR website at <http://www.dtronline.org>*



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