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Review

Special edition: Reporting the World Summit on Sustainable Development

jo'burg

Summit city

Review goes to Jo'burg

world summit special edition

Cover photo: Nadine Hutton

Stringing a thread through the issues

Jo'burg Summit City: special focus commissioned by Rehana Rossouw with pictures by Nadine Hutton

The local is the global

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Reporting the World Summit on Sustainable Development
Special edition on journalism, the environment and development

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Stringing you a thread

Summit details

- UN Summit 26/8-4/9
  Sandton Convention Centre
  www.johannesburgsummit.org
- Civil Society Summit 18/8-2/9
  Nasrec
  www.worldsummit.org.za
- Business Action for Sustainable Development Forum 28-30/8
  The Hilton Hotel
  www.basd-action.net
- International Council for Local Environment Initiatives 27-30/8
  Sandton Crowne Plaza
  www.iclei.org
  (Contact 27-11-4076729)
- South African Business Week 30/8-2/9
  Gallagher Estates
  www.businessweek.co.za
- Ubuntu Village 10/8-10/9
  Wanderers Stadium
  www.joburgsummit2002.com
- WaterDome 28/8-3/9
  The Dome in Northgate – www.waterdome.net –
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The World Summit on Sustainable Development is a great, big, huge thing. The issues are planetary and they affect everybody alive. The political investment is global and very intense (if you thought the Racism Conference was tense, wait for the issues that hit the industrialised nations in the pocket). The infrastructure to host the event is enormous and the money involved almost intergalactic (at least for this country in the south of Africa). Johannesburg is expecting 65 000 delegates and that's just to the main UN Conference of heads of state. There are at least six major events, with attached exhibitions, cultural events, etc. Nine thousand journalists are expected to converge on Johannesburg for the approximately three weeks this will all happen.

Already the summit has its avowed enemies – people who believe that the UN brouhaha is a complete waste of money and there are many journalists who are watching the roadshow come to town by indulging in their favourite pastime – cynicism.

Well, *Review* is not buying into the cynicism. Mostly because the issues are really important and worth talking about. And there is always a way to find a crack in the official agendas (and the multiple subterranean agendas) to use the space to do important journalistic things. It's all about being ingenious.

But because we recognise that the issues are so big and planetary, this *Review* is not trying to pot you a version for easy consumption. Rather, in this special edition, we are stringing you a thread to help you find a path through the rain forest.

We've divvied it all up into three sections. In section 1 we try to unravel some of the key issues (what's the history of all this? What is sustainable development?) with the help of those who've watched the global play unfold for at least the last 10 years. In section 2 we look at Johannesburg as the site of the summit and how that city is focusing on itself not just as host but as the home of the biggest urban population in South Africa. In section 3 we look at some local examples of where environmental journalism has – and hasn't – worked. Again we are not trying to be comprehensive. The authors of these pieces have applied their minds to what they see in their situations and articulated the concerns that while very local are simultaneously totally global.

Being editor of this edition has been a fascinating experience. Once I got beyond the forest of people who say things like "sustainable development is a buzzword, a catch-all, a fuzzy use of language", I started meeting those who have meticulously picked their way throught the issues to emerge on the other side having igured out how best to operate as journalists in this complex world. There were far more out there than are represented in this edition of *Review*, which is very heartening.

If I can give my take on what's going on: I think as human beings we're reaching that place where we've finally realised that working separately on major issues (scientists over here, politicians over there, civil society shouting from the sidelines) is no longer viable for this planet. And we're realising those old doom-laden tactics employed by the evironmentalists (the equivalent of the sandwich board saying "The end is nigh") just don't work so well any more on media savvy populations. That's maturity.

Of course there'll be politicking, of course there'll be aims not achieved, of course the US will behave in ways that set it apart from the rest of the human race.

But it's too important to let all this happen without the journalists in the thick of things – asking the right kind of questions and crafting the cleverest kinds of responses.

Anthea Garman
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The Konrad Adenauer Media Project in Southern Africa

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) is one of the six political foundations of the Federal Republic of Germany maintaining close links to the Christian Democratic Union party. The overarching goals of KAS are the worldwide promotion of democracy on the basis of a Christian conviction. Konrad Adenauer, Germany's first democratic chancellor after the World War II, was the driving force behind the reconciliation of Germany's former war enemies and the victims of the Nazi era. He was also a committed believer in European unification and highly influential in its initial phase. The new KAS Media Project in the Sub-Saharan Region therefore views its the media as a main pillar of democracy, integral to civil society essential functions. To encourage long-term development in the media sector in sub-Saharan Africa, KAS engages in various training activities for journalists and media managers, covering all relevant aspects of professional journalistic life. Special attention is given to electronic media and their particular opportunities for Africa and to strengthening research as fundamental to investigative journalism in the region. (www.kas.org.za)

EWK – the illustrator

Evert Karlsson was born in 1918 in Mogata, Sweden, a small agricultural community. He began to draw when he was working as an overseer on a farm. He would send his drawings to farmer federation newspapers and in 1951 resigned to work for a newspaper. His cartoons began to regularly appear in the *Aftonbladet* from 1960 as he drew increasing recognition for his drawings of politicians and political life. Environmental matters were important to him and he was one of the first cartoonists to draw attention to them. He began to receive international acclaim and in 1972 appeared as a visiting illustrator for *The New York Times*. Several times he was awarded the Salon International de la Caricature in Montreal and in 1969 received the Grand Prix for a cartoon of Mao Tse Tung. His unique style gave him a place alongside leading political illustrators such as James Thurber, Saul Steinberg, David Low and Ronald Searle. EWK received an honorary doctorate from Linkopping University in 2000. The EWK Sällskapet (society), the Municipality Söderkoping and the Östergötland Regional Museum are fundraising to establish a museum of political illustrations using EWK's 40 000 drawings as the core works. (www.ewk.se)

From Summit to Summit

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio was the culmination of thinking that owed a great deal to the green movements of the 60s and 70s which saw the founding, in 1961, of the World Wildlife Fund, the publication of American ecologist Rachel Carson's Silent Spring *(which warned of dire consequences of synthetic pesticide use and inspired a regulatory revolution), the establishment of Friends of the Earth at the close of the decade, and the founding of Greenpeace in 1971. Amnesty International also came into being at the start of the 60s and a great deal of "brown issues" thought – concerning individual human rights, and social and economic equity within and among nations – has been added in the intervening years.*

Much has changed since the Stockholm conference 30 years ago and much has remained the same. Chris van der Merwe travels the road from Stockholm to Johannesburg.

Freelance journalist Chris van der Merwe is co-author of Inside the Earth Summit *(Frontline Communications, 1992/3) – a series of reports on different sectors of sustainable development and author of* Summit to Summit *(Frontline Communications, June 2002), a review of the Rio Decade (1992-2002). Van der Merwe's seven World Summit preparation stories appear in full text on the Review website at www.rjr.ru.ac.za. The two reports – which contain background material on sustainable development invaluable especially to journalists and PR professionals and practical advice on how to approach the World Summit on Sustainable Development – are available from the authors as a single publication in electronic form. Orders: Karen Barrett, babatjie@aol.com; enquiries can be directed to Chris van der Merwe +27 (0)12 329 2001, adgeo@gem.co.za. When making enquiries via email or ordering the publication, please use as the subject: "Road Map – WSSD".*

1972

The UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, as ordered in 1968 by the United Nations General Assembly. This was a watershed event with representatives from 112 nations. The focus of developed nations was on environmental protection; that of developing nations development. In the same year an ambitious study *Limits to Growth*, was published. A computer model was designed to simulate future outcomes of the world economy. Among the conclusions of this "pessimist model" was that – with no major change in the physical, economic, or social relationships that have traditionally governed world development – society would, within 100 years, run out of the nonrenewable resources on which the industrial base depended. That would trigger a precipitous collapse of the economic system, manifest in massive unemployment, decreased food production and a decline in population as the death rate soared.

Soon after Stockholm, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – which would organise the Earth Summit 20 years later – was established. UNEP was to act as broker for international environmental cooperation, keep an eye on the state of the world environment and inform governments of emerging problems.

1980

In 1980, IUCN published the *World Conservation Strategy*. And in the mid-1980s, the inter-governmental World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, came into being. The commission published *Our Common Future*, an influential report on environment and development and urged the UN to hold another global conference on these themes. It defined "sustainable development" as progress that could "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Southern critics charged that the report was more concerned with moulding future development in the South than with changing growth and consumption in the North.

1991

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) produced a report, *Environmentally Sustainable Economic Development* in 1991. It called for measures then considered radical. It argued that nothing short of massive transfers to the poorer countries and higher prices for their exports would do.

1992

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro came soon after the Cold War had ended in a capitalist triumph over communism. Over 170 governments participated in the event that gave the world *Agenda 21*, the "blueprint" of sustainable development into the 21st century. Fidel Castro, self-styled champion of the world's poor, articulately demonstrated in his UNCED address how easily redspeak and greenspeak could be merged. That led some analysts to speculate that in a markets-dominated world sustainable development could help to fill the void left by the demise of communism. The NGO sector, which met at a separate venue, made a major contribution to the quality of debates and to strategic thinking at Rio and published over 30 "alternative" treaties, many advancing what appeared to be a socialist agenda. UNCED also adopted the *Declaration on Environment and Development and the Forest (conservation and management) Principles*.

Two legally binding conventions were also opened for signature by the nations of the world: The *Biodiversity Convention* – aimed at countering species extinction and ecosystems damage around the globe and the *Climate Change Convention* – aimed at slowing down global climate

The hot issues

What could be expected to be among the hottest issues for the WSSD – and for South Africa? That's something many journalists, faced with the bewildering task of untangling the WSSD, have been asking. After a round of networking and web-surfing, Chris van der Merwe sticks his neck out in offering a provisional list.

While it was impossible to predict at the time of writing (June 2002) what might dominate the headlines at the Summit two months later, a number of issues represent a virtually inexhaustible lode of potential editorial. These include:

- A Political Declaration
- Finance, trade and implementation
- "Ecological debt"
- "Equal but differentiated responsibilities"
- "Precautionary principle"
- The Kyoto Protocol
- US "unilateralism"
- The role of the military
- Peace and sustainable development
- Good governance
- Partnerships
- Corporate responsibility
- Nepad
- Zimbabwe
- The concept of sustainable development
- National Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Energy

- Food security, access to land and the use and ownership of resources
- HIV/Aids
- Women's rights
- Pollution
- Biodiversity
- The right to know and environmental education or education for sustainability which cuts across all the hot topics.

As the authoritative Bali-review *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* , published by the International Institute of Sustainable Development, notes, progress on agreeing on elements for the Political Declaration was likely to influence decisions by some Heads of State and Government regarding their attendance at the Summit. The Declaration "may provide the most authoritative and decisive place to deal with the core trade and finance issues…".

"The WSSD presents an opportunity for world leaders to face up to the contradictions embedded in the architecture of global governance when it comes to trade and sustainable development," adds the *Bulletin*.

"In the language of the new UNEP *Global Environmental Outlook* report, the choice is to pursue either a 'Markets First' scenario or a 'Sustainability First' scenario where global policy is no longer the servant of the trade regime."

In their *Declaration for Bali*, South African civil society major groups – including NGOs, faith-based groups, labour, the disabled, women, youth, civics, indigenous peoples, but excluding business, local government, science and farmers – charged that the impact market deregulation had reduced the state's role in the economy and that state power was increasingly weakened "by unaccountable corporate powers".

"In the process, justice, rights, democracy and the environment continue to be undermined. The divide between rich and poor becomes ever wider and the exclusion of disaffection of people ever stronger…"

Counters Laurraine Lotter, Executive Director of the Chemical and Allied Industries Association (CAIA) and an author of of the *Draft Business Plan* of South Africa's Business Co-ordinating Forum for the Johannesburg Summit, "Increasingly individual citizens are feeling disempowered in respect to having their government's address their concerns. This is reflected in the lower numbers of eligible voters exercising their vote. However corporations are not states and the mechanisms to hold them to account are different.

"Increasingly consumers are exercising their buying power to bring corporations to account. In comparing the 'power' of corporations and states it is important that the states have the power to raise taxes and enforce laws which can regulate every aspect of an individual's life. Corporations on the other hand must persuade enough individuals to purchase their goods and services to remain in 'power'."

change caused by human activity.

In signing the convention, governments agreed to the target of stabilising greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by the end of 2000. This goal, advocated by the EU, but opposed by the US, is to be reached voluntarily. The US did not sign the *Biodiversity Convention* on the grounds that provisions in the convention would unduly restrict the biotechnology industry. At the insistence of African countries, UNCED agreed to set up an Inter-governmental Negotiating Committee to negotiate, by June 1994, a UN *Framework Convention on Desertification*.

Developed countries agreed to providing "new and additional" finance – Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounting to 0.7% of gross domestic product targets – to enable developing countries to meet their obligations in implementing sustainable development.

The Earth Summit left many matters, seen as critically important by the NGO movement, unattended. For instance, the continuing addiction to fossil fuels, especially oil, was maintained; it left the field wide open for misuse of biotechnology and pesticides and omitted to crystallise the role of transnational corporations and the military in environmental destruction.

Agenda 21

Although *Agenda 21* "put the human being at the centre of environmental concern", issues of poverty did not receive the same attention at Rio as ecological matters.

NGOs were highly critical of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Bretton Woods global financial institutions. Yet they remained unaffected by UNCED.

World leaders and diplomats were criticised for displaying a lack of vision and for focusing on national issues at the expense of global ones.

When the Earth Summit ended, developed and developing country blocs still had vastly different agendas, which according to one expert looked like this:

Developed	Developing
Pollution	Land degradation
Acid rain/ozone depletion	Loss of biomass
Water quality	Water quantity/access
Over-production of crops	Monoculture crops
Landscape destruction (road-building)	Landscape destruction (mining)
Climate change	Desertification
Crime/drug abuse	Conflicts/civil strife

"Industrialised countries have continued to protect their own economies against competition from developing ones."

- Loss of biodiversity (in the developing world)
- Population stagnation

Loss of biodiversity (own)
Rapid population growth

There had been heated, inconclusive debates around the relative importance of "overpopulation" (seen as a problem in the developing world) and "overconsumption" (considered prevalent especially in developed countries) in environmental degradation.

Rio had its limitations, but it did succeed in putting issues of economic and social equity and environment on the same world agenda.

Media

The media in particular – whose eyes typically glaze over at the mention of "process reporting" – should recognise that the WSSD was conceived not as an exercise in rewriting *Agenda 21*, but as a forward-looking event informed by the lessons of Rio. Rio was a stepping-stone in a process, as many expect the WSSD to be.

At Rio, NGOs lobbied fervently for the establishment of an international post-Rio sustainable development watchdog body. The conference recommended the establishment of a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) that would meet annually to review progress.

1994

In 1994, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was set up. It has been credited with massively stimulating global trade, but is blamed for exacerbating poverty. Increasing trade liberalisation has had the effect of perpetuating the imbalances in economic relations between rich and poor nations. The situation has been likened to the shark saying to the fish, "I'll let you take a bite out of me, if you'll let me take a bite out of you."

Industrialised countries have continued to protect their own economies against competition from developing ones. WTO director general Mike Moore cited a recent study that said developing countries would gain US$155-billion a year from further trade liberalisation. That was more than three times the US$43-billion they receive annually in overseas aid. Sadly, predatory trade and bondage through debt have continued since Rio.

1997 Rio+5

The CSD has had much to complain about. Progress since Rio was slower than anticipated. By 1997, at the acrimonious Rio+5 Special Session of the UN in New York, little had changed for the better. The majority of developed countries stood accused of not having honoured their ODA commitment. Rio+5 degenerated into a slanging match between developed and developing world delegates over broken promises.

The developed countries tried very hard to commit all governments to timeframes in implementing all agreements. They also tried to bring new issues to the table. The developing countries, on the other hand, argued that if developed countries were not serious about contributing the 0,7% of GDP to ODA, developing countries would not be prepared to take on board targets or new issues.

By 1997 the ODA level had dropped to 0,34% of GDP. The developing countries were of the opinion that they were not even in a position to implement *Agenda 21* – more than 2 500 activities.

However, Rio+5 did issue a five-year programme for further implementation of *Agenda 21*. A comprehensive review would be done in 2002. That review comes with the World Summit.

2000 New York

At the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000 world leaders decided that the first 15 years of this century should be used for a major onslaught on global poverty, and set a number of targets – the *Millennium Development Goals* – for doing so.

2001 and Kyoto

The year 2001 brought both bad and good news. Shortly before the September 11th attacks, the US (which remains responsible for about 25% of the world's greenhouse gases) announced it would not back the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Yet, in November there was a historic agreement in Marrakesh, Morocco, at the 7th Conference of the Parties (COP 7) to the UN *Framework Convention Climate Change* that paved the way for the ratification of the *Kyoto Protocol* by almost all nations.

2002 Bali

As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan saw it, "Bali offered an opportunity to regain some of the momentum that had been so strongly felt at Rio. Already, the process leading up to PrepCom 4 had brought renewed attention to issues that had been largely overshadowed by conflicts, globalisation and, most recently, terrorism."

Annan proposed five specific areas where "concrete results were both essential and achievable". He offered an acronym to remember them by: "WEHAB" – Water, Energy, Health, Agriculture, Biodiversity.

South Africa was among the nations that hoped that PrepCom 4 would deliver a concise and focused document that would emphasise the need for a global sustainable development partnership and reconfirm the need for an integrated and strategically focused approach to the implementation of *Agenda 21*.

Developing countries raised the stakes. And, early in the second week, "the NGO community began to urge negotiators to bring their brackets (denoting controversial text that required further debate and, most

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likely, alteration) to Johannesburg rather than settle for a bad deal." Developing countries insisted that a poverty eradication strategy should not ignore the most important causes of poverty, among them unfair terms of trade and, in particular, the lack of market access for agricultural products from poor countries.

South Africa's Valli Moosa, charged with breaking the stalemate, presented negotiators with a package put together in behind-the-scenes consultations. But they remained divided and the Moosa deal was dropped. Ultimately, delegates failed to reach consensus on the "Draft Plan of Implementation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development". Discussions for Johannesburg would be based on the latest draft, and *Bali's Outcomes* would be subjected to renewed scrutiny in Johannesburg.

Failure to make progress on trade and finance issues, records the Bulletin, "was reflective of the problems in integrating the three pillars of sustainable development: Doha was negotiated by trade ministers; Monterrey by finance ministers; while the summit process had been flooded with environment and foreign affairs ministers."

The Bulletin neatly encapsulates outstanding issues, which falls into two categories.

"The first and perhaps fundamental set of issues that led to stalemate concern finance, terms of trade and globalisation. A second set of issues concerns the development of the Programme of Work spawned by *Agenda 21*, including a series of time-bound targets. Progress on these and other issues will only be unlocked when confidence is regained in the process."

In the uncertain days after the horror of 9/11, it seemed at least possible that there might be less unilateralism in the world and that The Johannesburg Summit might take up a theme of healing across historical divides. Bali put a damper on such hopes. The political will to make the world a fairer, safer and healthier place, which universal endorsement of *Agenda 21* at the Earth Summit seemed to signify, appears to have waned dramatically.

The US remained firm in its resolve to remain outside the Kyoto ratification fold. The US also voiced opposition to the inclusion of the "common and differentiated responsibilities" principle, and advocated individual responsibility instead.

That was seen by many Bali delegates as reflecting the unilateralist stance the US had taken since September 11 – a stance that many analysts say could wreck the Johannesburg summit.

Upon his return from Bali, minister Valli Moosa said in a statement that South Africa was "pleased that there was now global consensus on the main framework for the Summit".

It would focus on all three pillars of sustainable development: social development, economic development and the protection of the environment.

He reaffirmed that:

- the overall target of the Summit was the Millennium Development Goal to halve poverty by 2015;
- agreement on a global partnership between rich and poor countries, and between governments, business and civil society for sustainable development would be pursued, as well as
- agreement on an concrete programme of action in the areas of water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and food security, education and biodiversity.

Bali saw the launch of a million-signature anti-globalisation petition drive. And, as predicted, the intersessional period has been marked by a high level of civil society preparations – the stalemate at Bali providing added focus for campaigns around key unresolved issues – trade, globalisation, debt and the means, mechanisms and timetables for the financing of sustainable development.

Post-Bali

Post-Bali, the pressure on the host country, charged with the management of the WSSD process, has been greater than ever. "With uncertainty and political risk associated with significant sections of the agenda after PrepCom 4," asserts the Bulletin, "the 'Summit' status of the meeting cannot be taken for granted."

G8

The G8 Summit in Canada, at the end of June, had the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) among the most important issues on its agenda (along the "war on terror" which, for the US, reportedly took higher priority). In terms of Africa's showpiece strategy for the G8 and Johannesburg summit, the developed world would provide more aid, untied to trade, write off debt, encourage investment and access to its markets, and assist with good governance, infrastructural development, military training and conflict resolution. Africa would in turn be expected to embrace democracy, respect human rights, fight corruption, implement commercial, legal and financial systems acceptable to developed world partners, broker agreements for peace and provide troops to police them. Among African nations, the World Summit host country has been setting an example in doing exactly that.

In the final weeks before the Johannesburg Summit, dual First World-Third World agendas are obviously still a fact of life. Yet it seems that Nepad is still a serious prospect for providing a bridge at least between Africa and the rich nations. Bali seemed not to have dented the confidence of Nepad's architects at all as they persevered in selling the plan to fellow-Africans and to the developed world.

July 2002 AU

In an opinion piece published in Business Day, 27 June 2002, Dennis Brutus, emeritus professor of African Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, internationalist and former Robben Island prisoner, warned: "South Africa and the world are faced with critical ideological choices in coming weeks. What kind of case is the global left making?

"The stakes couldn't be higher. When the World Summit on Sustainable Development convenes in Sandton in late August, it will literally be deciding on an agenda for the planet. When countries joining the African Union (AU) met in Durban in July, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) was set as the agenda for our continent. But in reality, much of the agenda for both these events has already been determined by the Group of Eight (G8) leadership in its mountain hideout in Canada.

"… we learn… that the host country for the world summit and the AU are apparently intent on selling out the continent under the rubric of a plan crafted by the same technocrats who wrote Pretoria's failed Gear economic programme, under the guidance of Washington and the corporate leaders of Davos."

The AU launch is the last milestone event before the Johannesburg Summit where, as at Bali, developing countries will seize the moment to push for meaningful and action-oriented commitments on finance, trade and capacity building.

"Key to meeting the developing countries' demands will be the transformation of the Monterrey Consensus into an action agenda, and the delivery of political commitments set out in the Doha Declaration," says the Bulletin. If confidence is to be restored in the post-UNCED agenda, there will have be an authoritative commitment to fairness."

Clearly, the concept of sustainable development, so appealingly defined in *Our Common Future* and elaborated in *Agenda 21*, has not come through the Rio Decade unscathed. Some argue that it is a flawed concept, because it does not take into account the nature of humans, which is to consume, and that that is too inclusive and therefore unfocused and impractical.

Certainly, as the Bulletin observes, the complexity of the sustainable development agenda – seeking to "institutionalise a meaningful conversation between finance, trade and environment discourses" – presents a unique challenge to the multilateral system at the UN. "The problem has outgrown the system…"

The stakes for the champions of sustainable development are higher at the threshold of the WSSD than they were at Rio. At Rio, the concept still wore the blush of novelty; 10 years later, tried and tested, it also bears scars of failure.

How South Africa became host

At Rio, the South African government was not officially represented; a decade later, post-apartheid South Africa is hosting the 10-year review – a quantum leap in the country's international standing, and an extraordinary privilege few South Africans may yet appreciate. There were many other strong contenders. Chris van der Merwe relates how it happened.

Clearly, the UN had confidence in South Africa's capabilities, in terms of infrastructure and logistics, to host the WSSD. But there were many contenders at least equally capable in those areas. The decision to award the Summit to South Africa was the result of intensive, protracted and labyrinthine diplomatic effort.

Anyone who understands that would appreciate not only that South Africa is extremely privileged to have been given the Summit, but also that hosting it carries enormous responsibilities.

The Summit ended up with South Africa through a process of elimination. A leading member of the G77 (now numbering over 130 nations), South Africa was in the forefront of Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) negotiations over the Summit right from the start, and was among the countries to come up with guidelines for the process requested by the CSD.

The G77 advocated the idea that the Summit should be in a developing country. The African group at the UN reasoned that, at this stage of the continent's development, it would be to its advantage to have the Summit held in Africa.

Japan had been keen to be the host, and may have generously supported poor countries and NGOs to attend, if it had got the Summit. But when the principle of a developing world host was eventually accepted, Japan withdrew its candidacy. It then turned its attention to having the Summit hosted by a fellow Asian nation.

The regions in contention were Latin America, Africa and Asia. India and China were considered, but declined.

The European Union, which wanted the Summit to go to Africa, made various promises of support. Brazil, the Earth Summit host, was also interested, but many countries felt that it would be unfair if it also got the WSSD. Brazil was persuaded through persistent lobbying to step back in favour of South Africa.

By the time Brazil made its withdrawal formal, South Africa had formally indicated its interest. South Korea (at that stage for several years no longer a member of the G77), also pressed its candidacy, but its argument that it sympathies still lay with the developing world did not impress sufficiently.

Meanwhile, Indonesia had come to be informally considered (with Japan as a major backer) and in mid-2000 it declared its candidature. By now, South Africa had widespread support both in South America and the Caribbean.

There was a stalemate until the President of the General Assembly personally got involved. Indonesia then agreed to withdraw. If it had not, the matter would have had to go to the vote in the GA – a prospect the G77 countries didn't like.

Indonesia settled for a consolation prize: chairmanship of the CSD Bureau and Prepcom 4, where the final agenda for the World Summit would be negotiated.

A key factor in favour of South Africa's candidacy was the UN's view of South Africa as a country with balanced views on international issues that was typically keen to participate in a constructive manner. It was seen as a bridge-builder.

That is a credential of major importance in the context of a global process aimed at the brokering of a new deal between developed and developing nations. It could be argued that sustainable development is a means of managing conflict, on a national, regional or global scale.

In negotiating an end to apartheid and substituting it with one of the most enlightened constitutions in the world, South Africa acquired an international reputation as something of a miracle worker in conflict management.

A world in one country with both developed and developing world components, widely perceived to be a leading light among African democracies, and a bridge-builder of note, post-apartheid South Africa has the ear of key national leaders in the developed world and the trust of many countries of the developing world. For several years, it had been championing African Renaissance and a new world order.

Poverty alleviation would be at the heart of the "development" Summit, and the host nation could be expected to take a special and direct interest in helping to shape the agenda.

It could be argued that South Africa is a suitable host for several other reasons. It is able to demonstrate significant progress in implementing *Agenda 21* thinking.

It has a fairly well-established NGO sector – which made an impressive contribution to national documentation in support of South Africa's candidacy.

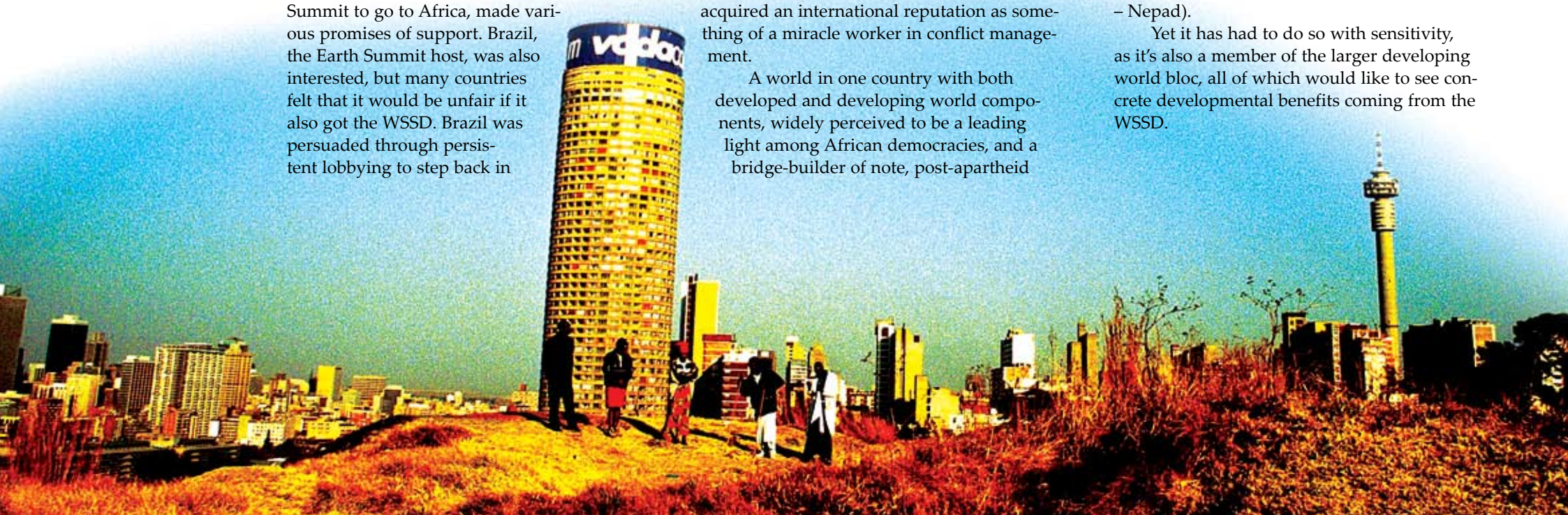
Finally, hosting an event of this magnitude requires not only competence and international standing: it requires motivation.

The South African Government has several reasons for its enthusiasm to host the Summit. It is keen to seize the opportunity to showcase the nation's ability to successfully host an event of scale (at the same time confounding the Afro-pessimists and promoting South Africa as an investment prospect of choice).

The global event also presents an unprecedented opportunity to put environment and development higher on the domestic agenda, while effecting a similar benefit for its region and for Africa as a whole. That holds the added benefit of reaffirming a role of leadership for South Africa within its region and continent.

As a member of the African group in the G77, South Africa has not been shy to champion regional progress (as it's now doing with the New Partnership for Africa's Development – Nepad).

Yet it has had to do so with sensitivity, as it's also a member of the larger developing world bloc, all of which would like to see concrete developmental benefits coming from the WSSD.



Sustaining the interest

Even though the World Summit on Sustainable Development is the first global conference devoted specifically to "sustainable development", that phrase has been with us for quite a while, says Jack Freeman. It was the centerpiece of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro 10 years ago.

Although "sustainable development" has been on the front burner of global diplomacy for a decade, to the ordinary newspaper reader or television news watcher it remains, at best, only vaguely understood – and hardly a priority concern. I would be astonished if even one percent of the people anywhere – except at the UN – could tell you what it means or why it might be important.

The fact is that the UN's efforts to promote sustainable development have received very little coverage in the mainstream news media, leading some to question whether the media might be shirking their responsibility to keep the public informed about such important issues. As a journalist who took part in coverage of the Earth Summit and dozens of international meetings and conferences since then, I would argue that the media have no cause to be ashamed. They have done about as well as they could, given the difficulties inherent in the task of explaining to the public:

- The unique complexities of the UN conference system and the documents it produces;
- the very specialised meanings that people at the UN give to such fundamental (and commonplace) terms such as "environment" and "development";
- and, not least, the welter of conflicting ideas about what "sustainable development" is or should be, and the international community's inconsistent commitment to it as a guiding principle.

The UN conference system

When I covered my first UN conference (the 1992 Earth Summit) I had 40 years of experience as a newspaper reporter, editor and television news writer and producer under my belt. Yet I was totally unprepared for the way such a conference does its work and arrives at its conclusions. For one thing, nothing is ever put to a vote, so the concepts of "majority" and "minority" are meaningless. Instead, the wording of the conference's final or outcome document is decided by a mass negotiation, in which each delegation – counting participating "observers" such as the Holy See (the Vatican) and Switzerland along with the UN's member states, there can be more than 190 such delegations – is free to propose changes or raise objections to anything that anyone else has proposed. Whenever such an objection is raised – whether to a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph or an entire chapter of the document – that portion of the text is placed in square brackets [like this]. Once in place, the brackets can be removed only by finding some alternative wording for the bracketed text that is acceptable to everyone. At the end of the process, any part of the text still bracketed is expunged.

As you might imagine, such a process requires a great deal of watering-down, blurring, fudging and other forms of evasion. (I once spent an entire morning covering a discussion as to whether a chapter heading in the document should be "The Family" or "Families" – and the session ended without resolution.) The end product of a UN conference is, therefore, necessarily bland and – almost quite literally – unexceptionable. (I say "almost" because, at the end of the conference, delegations may still enter "exceptions" to any sections of the document, which means they do not consider their governments bound by them.) In any case, the documents produced by this process certainly cannot begin to measure up to the

Jack Freeman *is senior editor and chief correspondent of The Earth Times, and has covered stories dealing with environment, development, human rights, population and other global issues all over the world. He edited the book All of Us: Births and a Better Life: Development and environment in a globalized world. He has a wide background in journalism, having worked as a writer, editor and producer for The Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser, The New York Post, Gentlemen's Quarterly, WCBS-TV News (New York) and NBC News, where he spent seven years as Tom Brokaw's writer on the NBC Nightly News. He is a frequent guest panelist on the United Nations' television programme "World Chronicle". He has also taught journalism at Fairleigh Dickinson University and New York University.*

"man bites dog" definition of newsworthiness. It is almost impossible for a journalist to explain them in simple, direct language that readers can understand and relate to. It is also all but impossible to explain to readers the significance of such documents, since, except for those dealing with international trade, they never provide for any mechanism to ensure that the promises made in them are honoured.

As if that weren't challenge enough for journalists covering UN conferences, many of these negotiations – and certainly those dealing with more sensitive or controversial matters – are conducted in "informal" sessions, which means they are closed to the press (even though NGOs may be able to attend them). Reporters can learn what transpired only at second hand: either from official briefings (which tend to play down whatever conflict might have flared) or from participants in the session, whose accounts might also be coloured by their own agendas.

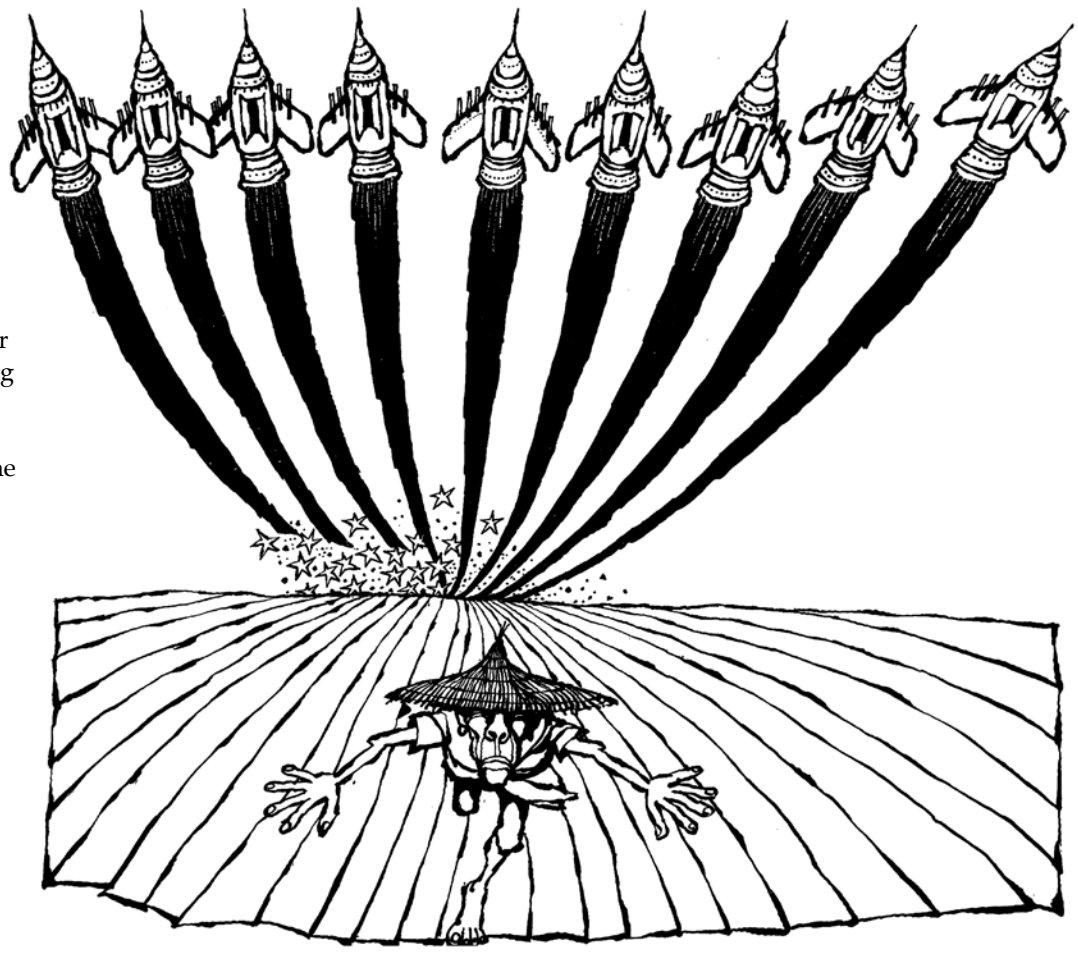
The definition confusion

The Rio Earth Summit was officially about "environment and development". And, although it was the environment aspect that got most of the attention (the Brazilians even called the event "Ecologia"), the real focus of the participants was on development. The difficulty, though, is that for the Rio Summit (and the UN in general) the terms "environment" and "development" meant and mean something very different from what ordinary people (and ordinary journalists) think they mean.

"Environment," according to the dictionary, means surroundings. The environmental movement deals mainly in efforts to improve people's surroundings by eliminating or cleaning up pollutants, contaminants and pathogens in the air, water and soil, along with efforts to protect wildlife and green spaces. At UN conferences, however, "environment" refers specifically to global environmental issues, such as global warming and the thinning of the planet's ozone-layer shield. None of these issues were nearly as "sexy" or emotional as the local water and air pollution issues that most people think of as "environmental".

"Development" is defined by the dictionary as the act of bringing to a more advanced state, expansion. Most people think of it in terms of building up of homes and businesses, of infrastructure, of progress and modernisation, of industrialisation. In the UN context, though, "development" refers almost exclusively to what is formally known as "international development co-operation" or "official development assistance" and is commonly known as foreign aid. The centerpiece of just about every UN conference is the negotiation of a deal between the countries that provide such assistance (the "donors") on the one hand, and the recipient countries on the other – "the North" and "South." The deal up for approval at Rio was that the recipient countries would agree to limit their economic expansion to ways that were "sustainable" (ie: not destructive of the planet's ecosystem) and the donor countries would agree to increase the level of their aid to those countries to make it feasible.

International development co-operation has been around for a little more than half a century, having begun with the Marshall Plan that the United States used to help rebuild the economies of Western Europe after World War 2. The Marshall Plan was also a major weapon in the cold war between the free market West and the Communist East. In the 1970s and 1980s, the East and West blocs stepped up the level of such aid to friendly governments as the cold war intensified. (Very little of that money was actually used to bring the economies of the recipient countries to a higher state – that is, for development – a fact which didn't seem to trouble either the donor governments or the recipients.) But the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of the 80s raised fears (quite correctly, it turns out) that these aid flows would shrivel without the impetus of cold-war rivalry. At the beginning of the 90s, the real purpose of the Earth Summit, for many of the so-called developing countries in particular, was to provide a new rationale – saving the planet for future generations – for the donors to keep on providing this "development" aid.



The broken link

But the link that was forged at Rio between environment and development – dubbed "sustainable development" – was never very strong, quite possibly because it didn't make as much sense to the donors as the previous link between cash payments (or credits) and political loyalty. Donors cut back sharply on their aid flows despite their promise at Rio to enlarge them. The poor countries felt betrayed and abandoned. They were also offended that the donor countries refused even to discuss their own unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. The "sustainable development" deal simply fell apart, as was made quite clear at the UN conferences that followed Rio.

The next big conference, on Barbados, was supposed to deal with the sustainable development of the small island developing states. It was convened with the idea of providing small-scale environmental "pilot projects" to show how the Rio arrangement between North and South was supposed to work. (The Barbados conference was one of the few tangible consequences of the Rio summit). Unfortunately, by the time the conference rolled around, the donors had lost interest in the whole project – there was a recession going on.

Other UN conferences that followed put the spotlight on population and development, on gender issues and development, on urbanisation, on food security – and with each one, the environmental emphasis of Rio was pushed further into the background. At the Millennium Summit, the donors made continued development assistance contingent on the poor countries' own efforts to combat poverty at home. At the Monterrey conference earlier this year, aid was made contingent on reform of governance and markets. And, of course, since last September 11, anti-terrorism considerations have trumped everything else on the list.

The environmental conventions that were signed at Rio and the funding mechanism that was approved there (the Global Environment Facility) now have lives of their own, for better or worse. But the North-South deal that was supposedly struck at Rio, with "development" aid contingent on environmentally sound policies, now has no life left in it at all. Which is why the organisers of the Johannesburg summit are so insistent on looking to the future rather than the past.

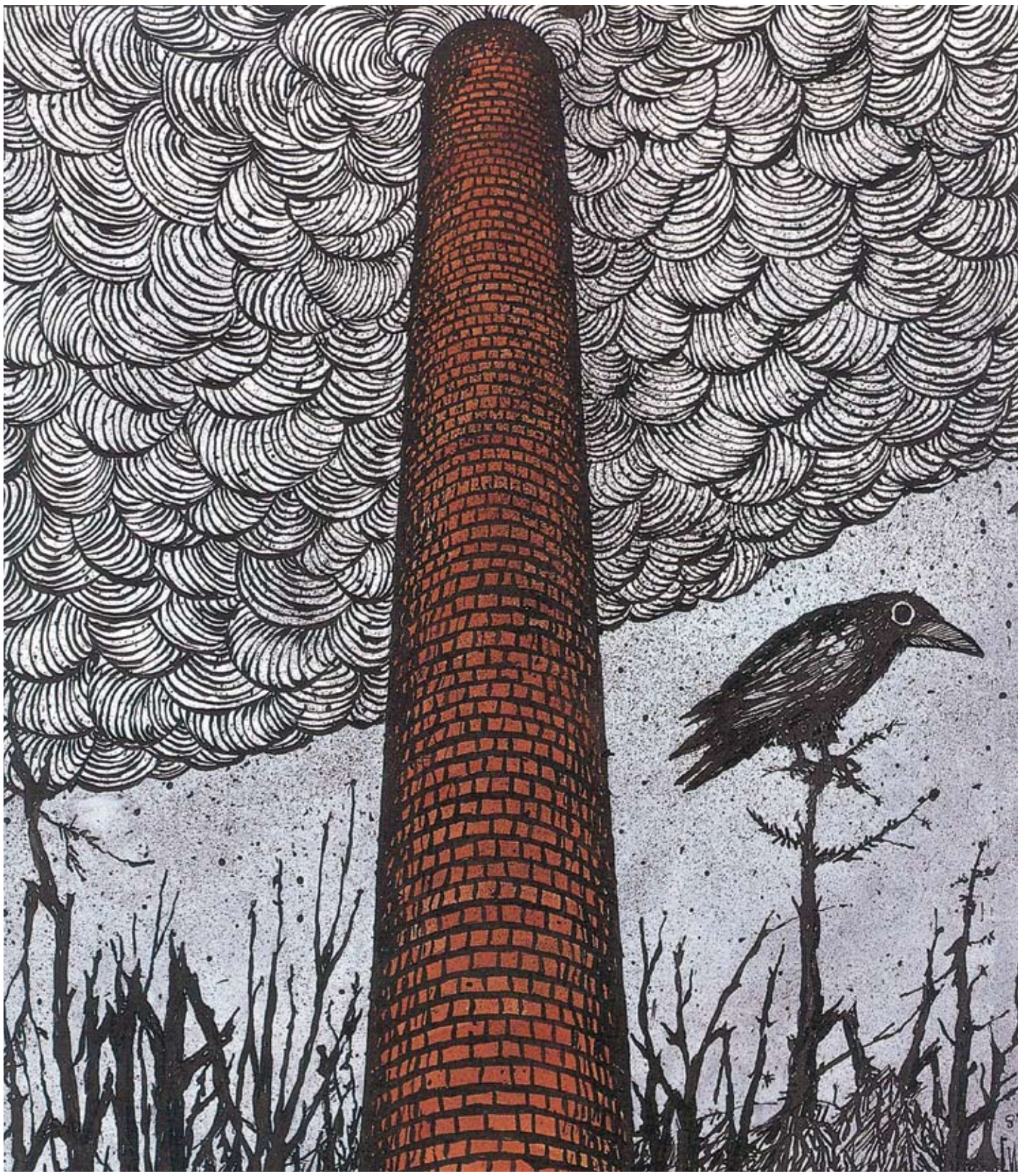
Now add journalism

I have sketched out some of the reasons why journalists might not find "sustainable development" a subject worth pursuing. It's too complex, too obscure, too fraught with words and phrases that don't mean what we think they mean. And even though some people might wish, for partisan purposes, to focus attention on the failures of some national administrations in this area, it is all but impossible to explain those failures in terms that ordinary people will find intelligible, let alone compelling. As a result, politicians (at least in the donor countries) shy away from public debate over these issues, and, without such public controversy, there can't be much of a "story" for journalists to cover.

I remember that, just before the Rio summit, there was a very brief spate of columns dealing with environmental issues published on editorial pages of US newspapers. Those columns (which I should note were all contributed by non-journalists) called attention to the upcoming Earth Summit, but none seemed able to explain what was so important about it. Indeed, in the 10 years since then, I have never spoken to anyone outside the UN's "sustainable development" loop who had any understanding of what the Earth Summit was about – or, consequently, any real interest in the subject.

Should we journalists feel a sense of guilt or inadequacy because we have not been able to enlighten our readers about this? I don't think so. At a press conference given by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1994, I called his attention to the fact that many reporters covering the summit were complaining that they were having difficulty getting their stories printed; their editors found them lacking in interest. Was there anything that the Secretary General could say that might help these reporters overcome this hurdle? Boutros-Ghali hesitated for a moment and then responded: "Perhaps the editors are right. We may be making history here but we are not making news."

Reporting for change



Ten years ago, says Vlady Russo, more than 9 000 journalists covered the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Most of the articles and news broadcast from Rio de Janeiro were purely dry facts on events, workshops and meetings. Most of the time, actions to address environmental issues were reported based on the inverted pyramid paradigm; no reflection, engagement or critical thinking were evident in the majority of the 'environmental' news accounts.

At that time, environmental journalism, was a narrow area of reporting with a focus on ecology, scientific issues and natural disasters. The issue of objectivity was important and journalists were afraid of voicing their concerns and emotions.

Environmental reporting becomes clearer when people understand the broader concept of environment as including social, economic, political and biophysical issues. Due to its very nature, I believe environmental reporting should use a wider frame rather than a specific frame or beat (eg social or environmental).

This can be done when reporting on an event, an environmental risk or issue, a community concern, a political decision, a

"It is important to consider communities and the public as our partners for action and change rather than target audiences that need to be filled with information in order to change their attitudes and behaviours."

developmental process or a natural disaster. The problems begin when journalists do not have enough background on the issues being reported; they have to rely on the same sources, often governmental institutions, NGOs or 'experts' on the subject. It is simply easier to report facts based on other people's opinions and views.

Environmental reporting also covers issues such as ecotourism, sustainable development, genetically modified organisms, indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, etc. These are issues that require some in-depth understanding, if not a sound knowledge of the issues, and a working knowledge of their interrelationship with the broader environment.

Based on my experience, I believe that to report on these kinds of issues in a meaningful and appropriate way to promote change (through action-taking), one needs to have some understanding of them as well as of good sources to rely on. I would describe sources as not only the experts and government officials but mainly the people affected by the problems (as vital key players in shaping stories and providing their perspectives for the news). This means journalists should also be seen as part of the problem and solution.

In order to not only see environmental issues as scientific and complex, journalists should undergo training and be exposed to different ways of reporting environmental news around the world. This will not only provide challenging ideas on how to report meaningfully with a view to promote change and action, but also to enable them to seek relevant and contextualised environmental information.

Seeking environmental context

When seeking environmental information for context and understanding, it is important to consider the role of 'common' people and key players. However, there is a need to also consider the way the media disseminates and shares that information.

The approach I use is based on the assumption that by gaining a broader understanding of environmental issues through a consultative process involving different sources of information, a clearer picture will emerge. These sources include people (affected and being affected by the issue), places and publications. I believe that to enhance environmental reporting, journalists need to broaden their perspectives by obtaining as much information as they can, but also considering time limitations, editors' priorities and lack of resources.

It is important to consider communities and the public as our partners for action and change rather than target audiences that need to be filled with information in order to change their attitudes and behaviours. This can be done by involving a wider number of community members when obtaining information and recognising that we should 'do' the first step, after all, journalists are also part of communities.

Stimulating debate and questioning

Action for change can be encouraged if there is a component of debate and questioning among the public. This is achieved by involving the community in an engaged and interactive debate and by reporting on issues relevant to local rather than global issues within the context of the society where we live. By giving voice to people affected by the problems, without patronising them or promoting a guilty sentiment for those provoking the problem, it is possible to initiate critical debate leading to action for change. This makes environmental reporting flexible and responsive to people's concerns.

Action for change takes place based on real problems affecting real people and the environment. This is especially relevant for environmental reporting and has a significant influence in the stimulation of engaged debate.

Some of the key points emerging in this "new way" of reporting environmental issues, a focus on action and change, are: the involvement of journalists in stories and interaction with partner groups, the use of balanced and controversial viewpoints, application of interactive media techniques and a combination of different approaches to journalism, and reporting as objectively as possible while considering subjective factors.

Supporting action-taking

For the mainstream media to support and cover action-taking activities there is an economic need for sensationalism, a social predisposition to report disaster and a political component to opposition to the government. Bad news sells much better; this is the economic gymnastics the media has to consider when reporting news. When this reporting is only based on criticism and sensationalism but doesn't provide critical analysis of the issue, it can limit the understanding of the root causes of the problems and provoke emotional reactions from civil society. Action-taking activities are successful if the support given by the media is based on a spirit of sharing ideas through co-operation rather than simply reporting dry facts and alarming news. According to Addison (1993) this approach can stimulate free debate on environmental problems and call for action and collaboration between the community and the media.

Another essential that needs to be recognised by the media while supporting action for change is the use of critical communication techniques and socially critical approaches. Again, encouraging critical questioning and a critical analysis of the news can lead civil society to make meaning of 'what they already know', and seek solutions for socio-environmental problems. A two-way communication process is important to achieve this, particularly within the context of a population which normally takes part in activities if their interests are at risk.

Civil society needs to be seen by the media not just as

Vlady Russo is an Angolan working for the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme in South Africa. For the past six years he has been supporting environmental reporting in Angola through the Ecological Youth of Angola. His career as an environmental journalist started in 1996 when he started the first environmental radio programme in Angola "Green Phone." He has been involved in the establishment of radio programmes, presented slots on environmental issues for Angolan television and has been published in Angolan regional newsletters. He is the editor of the bulletin of the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) and of the EEmail — the newsletter for the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme.

mere spectators powerless to respond to issues who are indoctrinated with information that sells. Society is in constant change and its members need to become partners and actors who can interpret the news, understand the situation and take action to solve problems.

An uphill battle

Environmental reporting, as in any other area of journalism, is limited by a number of political, social and economic issues. These include political control of the state media, economic pressures on the private media and cultural and social differences within the society. To make the situation more complex there are also technical and ideological issues such as free access to sources of information, objectivity versus subjectivity and sensitivity to biased reporting. These factors put enormous pressure on environmental journalists and can only be overcome with growing experience and strong support from media institutions.

However, these limitations do not take from the media the crucial role it plays in reporting environmental issues by ensuring the community actively participates in change by questioning and debate, action-taking activities and information seeking.

There is no single 'recipe' or 'model' for reporting environmental issues in a way that promotes action for change without compromising a number of stakeholders. Win-win situations are only possible if a combination of approaches and orientations to environmental reporting are used, based on dialogue within the society and collaborative reflection by members of civil society.

According to Archibald (1999) environmental reporting needs to be able to provide clear information so people understand environmental issues and are able to make informed decisions leading to action. To achieve this, more training, space and time should be given to environmental journalists. Recognition that journalists also face environmental risks and are likely to be subjective when affected or advocating a cause needs to be taken into consideration.

The concept of being objective when reporting should not be over-emphasised every time news is reported. It is commonly argued that objectivity is a way of reducing the impact of journalists' opinions, emotions and other subjective feelings. For example, according to Morris (1996), objectivity is the journalist's commitment to balance, fairness and independence of views in their reporting. This might give the impression that journalists avoid their civic responsibility to address a problem, transforming them into 'cold' people who seem unaffected by environmental issues.

To avoid this kind of 'manipulation' of the news, I suggest an approach based on a balance of objective reporting, recognising it is often impossible to factor out subjective forces such as social values and knowledge, ideologies and personal principles.

To Killingsworth and Palmer (cited by Hannigan 1999) reporting using an objective and balanced approach means that journalists "…often attempt to distance themselves and their readers from the environmentalist struggle… taking refuge instead in the objectivism of science". Therefore, writes Hannigan (ibid.), journalists seem to express "…themselves as a neutral and ironic voice… that… rarely express the content of environmental stories in overtly political terms, opting instead for news frames which emphasise conservation, civic responsibility and consumerism".

For the benefit of all, including the journalist, it is important to report environmental issues in a way that shows an advocacy role and "…willingness to get involved in the debate by bringing new facts and new interpretations to bear on arguments" (Fairley 1997).

Fairley argues that biased reporting is unlikely to earn readership because it is clearly unsupported by facts which can compromise the role of the media in promoting action for change. On the other hand, advocating a cause or flagging a position, without being extremist and radical, can bring about understanding, dialogue and action. Journalists can advocate action for change if they are able to produce balanced news and catalyse educational and social change processes within their communities.

Looking to the future

The role of environmental reporting in supporting environmental learning and action for change is being undermined by the fact that it is neither seen as a priority nor as an important specialised area of journalism. Nonetheless, environmental journalism is still an area in constant change and adaptation due to lack of freedom of the press, the narrow perception of the environment and high competition among media companies. Lack of resources and funds to support capacity building and training are also some of the constraints of environmental reporting.

Another issue of concern is still the debate over objectivity and subjectivity in reporting which seems to dominate most of the discussions on the 'paradigm' for journalism. Rather than spending time in this endless debate, the media should look at issues of accuracy of information dissemination through reporting facts without bias towards specific interest groups and by involving different partners.

In order to support environmental learning and to promote action for change, members of the civil society should be seen as, and act as, a partner (be actively involved and engaged) in the process of 'making' news and not as the 'target' (a passive recipient who receives instructions).

To promote action for change, environmental reporting cannot be purely objective, but rather must use an approach which attempts to report objectively but which recognises subjective factors such as societal values and knowledge, ideologies and personal principles. Journalists should be 'in the picture' and see themselves 'in the mirror' because they are part of society. And, rather than seeing the old inverted pyramid (what, who, when, where, why) as the recipe, journalists should use it as a guiding framework with useful questions to obtain relevant information. Relevant to whom? That's another challenge.

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The coverage of place

Ecotourism meets, and thrives, on the Internet

"How do we connect the circle that unites readers-travellers-locals-writers-travel companies-social activists-educators?"

In November 2001, Planeta.com sponsored the Media, Environment and Tourism Conference (MET) (www.planeta.com/ecotravel/period/metevent) which brought together more than 160 journalists from around the globe for a forum that linked the environmental and tourism beats.

Discussion ranged from reflections on the state of travel guidebooks to the ethics of environmental journalism to suggestions for niche publishers. Most of the discussion focused on the urgent need for journalists to improve the "coverage of place".

Since 1994 Planeta.com has been a pioneering website at the intersection of environmental and travel journalism. In recent years it has facilitated 10 online conferences and more than 50 forums. The MET Conference was the seventh formal conference and was co-sponsored by Guidebookwriters.com, National Geographic Traveler, Society for Environmental Journalists and Sustainable Sources.

The MET Conference invited participants to reflect upon, and answer, a series of questions about the linkages between media coverage, tourism and the environment:

- Do journalists have a definition of what constitutes ecotourism?
- How will journalists cover 2002's International Year of Ecotourism?
- What is the status of media outlets interested in publishing articles, books or websites or producing documentaries about environmental travel?
- Is there a difference between taking a free trip from a travel company or an environmental group?
- How reliable are ecotourism statistics?
- How reliable are eco-related certification standards?
- How can journalists work together to evaluate and cross-check tourism destinations and services?

Active participation in the MET Conference was limited to media professionals with at least two years' experience in either environmental or travel media. The result was a frank discussion and some intriguing proposals for follow-up work. The conference developed a number of innovative proposals:

- As journalists, we should focus more on place instead of destinations. The market for this type of reporting will have to be developed with editors and publishers.
- We need to create our own list of questions that should be standard for a review of sustainable tourism practices.
- We recommend that specialists offer Internet workshops for local leaders working toward environmental conservation and tourism development.
- We recommend the development of synergistic networks of websites dedicated to environmental travel.
- We encourage local roundtable discussions around the globe.
- We should develop own publishing arm for a literature that focuses on the quality of place.

The media and ecotourism

At the dawn of the International Year of Ecotourism, "ecotourism" remains a buzzword – still undefined in most newsroom dictionaries. Check out the variety of businesses listed when you plug "ecotourism" into a web search engine,

Author and journalist Ron Mader lives in Oaxaca, Mexico and presents workshops and presentations throughout the Americas. Mader hosts the award-winning Planeta.com website and is the author of the Mexico: Adventures in Nature guidebook and the Exploring Ecotourism in the Americas resource guide. In 2001 he hosted the online Sustainable Development of Ecotourism Web Conference, hosted by the World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Environment Programme. The summary of the online conference was used in the preparation of the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism which will be presented at this year's World Summit on Sustainable Development.

A key tool in the dissemination of information

Few will argue that the Internet provides any issue a 'wide web' of possibilities… if you know how to use it. Many environmentally-minded individuals, groups and journalists are using the web to disseminate information about the environment in the form of ecotourism. It has been argued that ecotourism can romanticise the seriousness of sustainable development by luring tourists to exotic sites, not polluted waterways. However, if done properly, others feel reporting on ecotourism can raise public awareness, 'luring' people to locations where they will not only enjoy themselves but learn something in the process.

Planeta.com, under the direction of Ron Mader, is developing a network of like-minded journalists by facilitating dialogue, resource links and tips for ecotourism reporting. For Mader the web is a key tool in the dissemination of information for those wishing to see the long-term success of environment and socially-friendly projects. The watchdog function of journalists is being shared among stakeholders with access to the web.

Increasingly, journalists, like other professionals, are just learning to use the web in more effective ways. The web provides not only for global distribution of edited materials, it also provides the community forums and specialised listserves in which questions can be asked in public. Up to now, the preferred means has been using private email. Journalists are just beginning to learn how to ask questions in these public forums, says Mader.

The website host says during the Dot-com bubble, the Internet provided incredible salaries for freelancers. Those salad days are over, but there are still jobs available for those writing for the web. Publishers are also learning how to weave the web into more traditional venues, like books, newspapers, radio and magazines.

Debuting in 1994, Planeta.com was one of the first sites on the web to focus on ecotourism. The site explores both environmental issues and tourism, particularly in the Americas. According to Mader, ecotourism is considered a practical development/conservation strategy.

Planeta.com has been named one of the 50 best travel-related websites by *Trips* magazine and one of the top 1 000 sites on the Internet by *PC Computing*. In 2001 the Mexican government presented Planeta.com the "Lente de Plata" (Silver Lens) award for its coverage of Mexican tourism.

and very few have a relation to either local communities or toward environmental stewardship. Planeta.com features a special guide to definitions – which outlines the terms used on our site as well as links to related resources. Other magazines and wire agencies are not quite so diligent with terms.

Ecotourism can mean anything from a community lodge to a jet ski operator. Too often editors allow their advertisers to define the word. I've chastised several colleagues for referring to golf courses as "ecotourism" simply because the courses were green. (This is not to imply a disdain for golf courses, but rather the need for distinction.)

Worse than greenwashing occurs when the mainstream media simply dodges stories. Incident: In 1997 a Norwegian cruise ship literally plowed over a reef offshore Cancun. The story received little press in Miami – the cruise ship's home port.

Could the reason for the absence of such stories have anything to do with the advertisers? These accounts are some of the most lucrative for the largest dailies and magazines. Editors and publishers may say their readers are not interested, that travel writing is escapism. If so, readers need to demand more from their publications.

There is one other attitude at play – editors aren't sure where to place these environmental/travel stories. The newsroom divide between "travel features" and "hard news" is a gulf at most dailies. When it comes to stories such as the negative environmental impact of cruise ships, editors debate whether to play it as a light feature or news. Too often, papers ignore this type of story as one that editors can ignore since it lies "out of the box".

Media disintegration

Nothing is more frustrating than the demise of environmental media after it flourished at the top of the 1990s. The great collapse occurred only a few years after the 1992 Earth Summit. Promising magazines, newspapers and newsletters such as *Texas Environmental News*, *Environment Watch: Latin America* and *Mexican Environmental Business* disappeared.

In travel media we have seen a similar collapse. Post 9/11, publishers are cutting back on publications and operations. Avalon has announced it will cease the "Adventures in Nature" guidebook series and other specialised books are also being removed from the shelves.

On the web, the OAS-funded "Destination Management Services" websites for Central and South America disappeared and defaulted on payments to writers and editors. Other projects pulled their own plug, including Central America-focused Green Arrow Guide and UK-based Geographic.

Having insider experience with several of these ventures, I am keenly aware of the challenges.

It's a paradox that while we have a great number of superb writers and an interest in ecotourism, the paying market is very small. Outside of a few wonderful niche magazines and journals, international reporting seems limited to what was discussed in official meetings or distributed by NGO communications offices. We find very little investigative reporting unless it is tied to fairly sensationalistic topics.

What we don't find are more modest fact-checking endeavours. Questions that we could ask include: What are the results of internationally-funded ecotourism projects in the developing world? What are the results of WWF's or CI's conservation programmes? How well does certification work in forestry or coffee? Can these lessons (and should they) be transferred to tourism certification?

Any of these questions could be "answered" via a phone conversation or email, but it would require a costly trip to confirm the details, and frankly, few media outlets are interested.

My solution – we need to pursue a new direction.

Healing the disconnect

There seems to be a pattern here: the lack of communication leads to the lack of continuity and subsequent failure of journals, of ecotourism projects, of environmental conservation initiatives. The solution seems quite clear. We need to improve communication across the board.

Let's interpret communication as those reports and publications in the public realm. Whether the reports are polished magazine articles or in-house digests, they play a role in focusing attention on the issues. If we are seeking effective environmental policies, then what is needed, post haste, are honest reviews of what is taking place. Too often NGOs and government offices alike use the web to provide brochure-level materials that put their projects in a good light. There's nothing wrong with this, but the institutions could go a step further — provide timely reports, case studies, budgets, personnel lists and other contacts. Likewise, professional media outlets could dedicate themselves not only to reporting what people say they are doing, but instead the fact-finding missions in which to investigate the claims.

Where is the press coverage of failed development initiatives? These topics lack the sex appeal of a cruise ship disaster, and even that's poorly told. I don't believe it is the role of the media to play the eternal doomsayer and critic, but it is our job to pay attention. Publications need to report failures and successes alike.

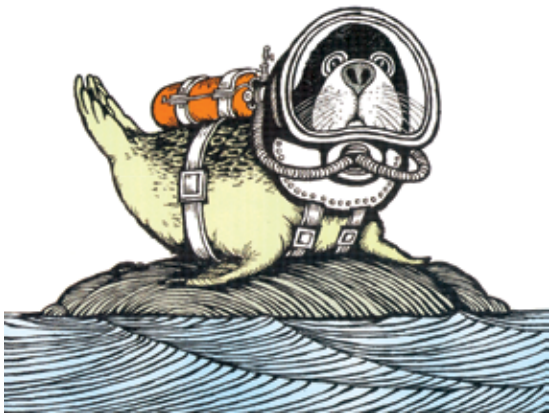
Improving communication should be our number one priority. If we have more work than we have markets, we need to be more creative. And I don't think it requires an us-versus-them attitude. How do we connect the circle that unites readers-travelers-locals-writers-travel companies-social activists-educators? It's what we do online every day, but this hasn't yet filtered into our "natural world" in an effective manner.

One of the frequent discussion threads during the MET Conference is the continued discussion of the value of local reporters versus parachute journalists. Why don't we write more about the places where we live? (Mind you, it's not just journalists who have trouble working locally. How much do international ecotourism organisations or conservation groups work in their own backyard?)

As we cover the globe, we need to pay attention and participate in our own localities. If there is a disconnect, let's find a way to heal it.

How?

- Writers should form alliances and networks to assist each other.
- Publications should dedicate more space to explaining the complexities of ecotourism. (It doesn't need to be dry!)
- Development agencies and government offices should be more honest about their initiatives and welcome participation from individuals and institutions alike.
- Foundations should support the meetings and initiatives that foster open, cross-sector dialogues. There should be an immediate end to the funding of closed-door meetings.



jo'burg

summit city

Stories commissioned by Rehana Rossouw and photographs by Nadine Hutton

Egoli: city of gold
Jozi: city of dramatic transformation
Jo'burg: city of the New South Africa, talking to the world
Johannesburg: World Summit city

The green heart

BY LUCILLE DAVIE

In the heart of the inner city is a green project that combines community involvement and education with environmentally friendly building principles – in a small corner of Joubert Park in Johannesburg.

The project is the GreenHouse People's Environmental Centre Project, initiated in 1993 by Earthlife Africa Johannesburg, in partnership with the City of Johannesburg. The Danish Cooperation for Environment & Development provides the majority of current funding. Vanessa Black, programme co-ordinator of the project, says: "This is unique. Few educational demonstration projects are as accessible – 800 000 commuters already pass through the general area on a daily basis – or which tackle a dense, inner city environment such as that of Joubert Park."

The broad aim of the GreenHouse Project (GHP) is to develop a clear, practical knowledge base for making greater Johannesburg a green city, using principles laid out in Agenda 21, the major sustainable development document produced at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

Joubert Park was one of the first open spaces to be planned for Johannesburg's inner city. Proclaimed in 1906 but planned in 1887, it was named after a Boer military hero, Commandant-General PJ Joubert.

These days it is associated with the surrounding flatlands, which have become overcrowded, and are plagued by high unemployment and crime. The park provides the residents with a quiet and tranquil place, a green oasis in which to unwind. Around 20 000 people use the park each month.

The project has three main focus areas:

- To demonstrate development practices which will sustain people and the environment;
- To support organisations working to improve the urban environment, particularly community-based organisations; and
- to disseminate information that will enable individuals to improve the quality of life in their community in a sustainable manner.

Plans are in place to showcase the regeneration of the Joubert Park area at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, taking place in Johannesburg in August and September.

The GreenHouse Project is a section 21 company. Besides Earthlife Africa and the City of Johannesburg, its other partner is the Sustainable Energy and Environment for Development Programme (SEED).

The GHP is creating an environment resource and development centre in the north–west corner of the Park, at an estimated cost of R26-million. An old potting shed is being converted into a new project office and resource centre, using environmentally friendly principles, in the first phase of development.

The first step was to draw up a 'green' specification for the building contractor that specifies management of the site and building process. This involves minimising waste, preventing air, water, soil and noise pollution, and using labour–intensive methods.

Some serious education is going on at the site at the same time. The Project is giving on–site environmental training to the construction team, in the form of the broader environmental and health impacts of the manufacture, transport, use and disposal of the building components.

"A number of environmental interventions are being made in the renovation process," says Black. The rubble, soils and tar created from the demolition of the existing structure are being kept aside to be used again. The same applies to second-hand items like windows and doors, which are being restored for re-use. Where second–hand materials are not available, small companies and local artists are being assigned to make the materials.

The building will use energy and water efficiently – a built-in solar cooker will be used, rainwater will be saved in two large tanks, and 'grey' water, or water from hand-washing, will be cleaned of oil and soaps by sand and reeds and used on the garden. Two composting toilets are being installed.

Innovative ideas are being adopted – a straw bale wall is to be used, and a dung and earth floor is being laid throughout the building.

Thulie Manana, owner of Abathandi Construction, the company involved in the construction and renovation, says of her involvement in the project: "I have learnt so much, like not mixing soil and rubble but keeping the soil aside to mix with the cement, or breaking down walls carefully to keep the bricks for re-use."

She says her builders were initially resistant to the new ideas, but now see the advantages of them and plan to take these ideas back to their rural homes.

Both Black and Manana agree that using new methods has slowed down the operation, as a reasonable amount of the work is experimental, like trying out different mixtures of plaster for the outside walls. Different oxides have been mixed to give colour and durability so that the walls don't have to be painted.

The remaining open space on the site will be planted with vegetables, herbs and useful trees using permaculture techniques. Twelve local community members are being trained in organic growing methods to

produce food and muti plants in the confined inner city spaces they occupy.

"The current renovation is part of a longer-term plan for the development of the site, which includes many more innovative energy-generation, building, landscaping and water management methods," adds Black.

Once the building is complete, expected in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in August, the nearby 99-year-old glass Victorian conservatory is to be renovated, at a cost of between R2 to R5-million. At present the conservatory is very much in use, but the timber and glass of the structure needs restoration, in addition to the system of levers and pulleys which are used to adjust the ventilation of the hothouse.

In addition to the first phase of the building, and the permaculture garden, the GreenHouse team will have an exhibition displaying the Project details, step by step, for Summit delegates to view.

The Centre is at present involved in supporting various communities in the city.

It gives support to community organisations in Soweto in their open space projects; it workshops with tenants in several high-rise buildings on energy and environmental health issues in partnership with housing NGO Cope Affordable Housing; and it is working with another housing NGO, PlanAct, to assist the community of the Muldersdrift Housing Trust to plan and implement ecological housing development in the area, 40 kilometres west of Johannesburg.

The GHP worked closely with the City of Johannesburg in 2001 in reformulating the city's 10-year housing strategy into an Environmentally Sustainable Housing Policy for the City.

"Much of this outreach work is conducted as part of the national Sustainable Energy and Environmental for Development Programme which partners non-governmental and local authority organisations working on affordable housing and is building the capacity of young black professionals in the energy sector," adds Black.

The Project also has a regional information dissemination strategy which aims at assisting others to replicate environmentally sound methods in other areas. In addition, it enables the built environment sector to become more environmentally conscious. Suggested ideas are installing a grey-water system in which the water can be recycled, or to re-paint with environmentally-friendly paint.

Further research into environmentally-sound materials available in South Africa and DIY methods, is being undertaken. It is hoped that this information will help built environment decision-makers to make more environmentally-sound decisions, at the same time valuing traditional skills and supporting local green businesses.

The Project also works with other civil society organisations such as Lapeng Child and Family Resource Service to service the community needs of Joubert Park by means of the Joubert Park Coordinating Forum.

Several joint activities have been undertaken: the Ziyabuya Children's Art and Culture Festival, the Youth Empowerment Project, and more recently, the Creative Inner City Initiative which involves "creatively regenerating" the environments of Joubert Park, Hillbrow and Berea.

"Many of these partnerships in themselves pilot a new approach to sustainable urban regeneration where government, business and civil society organisations work across sectors to bring about positive change; and are internationally recognised in Agenda 21 as international best practice," explains Black.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery, also in the Park, contributes to the efforts to help regenerate Joubert Park and the surrounding flatlands.

Johannesburg News Agency

The 99-year-old glass Victorian conservatory with its system of levers and pulleys will be renovated.

The urban rain forest

BY LUCILLE DAVIE

It's official – there are six million trees in Johannesburg. On satellite pictures, the city looks like a rain forest, albeit man-made. There are 1.2 million trees within the parks and on the pavements, and 4.8 million in private gardens throughout the suburbs.

So says Alan Buff, senior manager of technical support and training at Johannesburg City Parks. How did he arrive at that figure? "In 1996 we counted the trees in the northern quadrant of the city, and when the municipalities joined forces to form the unicity, their records, together with the records from 1904, gave us a figure of 1.2 million trees," he says.

"For a count of private gardens, we took the total number of stands and their size, and after getting a sample of the average number of trees per stand, we arrived at the figure of 4.8 million."

In the 1880s when Afrikaner farmers settled on the Witwatersrand there was hardly a tree in sight. The highveld is a typical savannah/grassland system, which means that besides grassland and scattered scrubs, there are no naturally occurring trees. These early farmers brought seeds from the Cape and planted acorn, oak and walnut trees. The Bezuidenhout family, among the first white settlers in the area, planted fruit trees in Judith's Paarl and Cyrildene, east of the city centre.

Tree planting took a huge leap forward when gold was discovered in 1886. The early mining companies developed a nursery at the Horticultural Training Centre at Zoo Lake. Here experiments were conducted to test which trees were suitable for mine props. This resulted in blue gums being planted in suburbs with water like Saxonwold, Parktown, Langlaagte, Craighall and Fairlands.

At the same time other species of trees, all exotics – oaks, planes, pepper trees – were given to residents, particularly in Parktown and Westcliff, to plant in their gardens and also along their streets.

Joubert Park and what was known as Kruger Park, now Park Station, were laid out as the city's first parks, and planted with pepper trees, a tree that was popular for planting near stables as it was believed to repel fleas. "It was discovered that pepper trees were not suitable street trees, as they get too big, so these trees were taken out," says Buff. Some of these 100-year-old trees can still be seen around the city: in Parktown, Houghton and at Tolstoy Farm, Mahatma Gandhi's settlement 35km south-west of Johannesburg. "Gandhi particularly liked pepper trees – he planted a circle of them at the farm, and they're still there," adds Buff.

As the suburbs of Johannesburg expanded, street trees were planted and preference was given to trees the colonials were familiar with: oaks, planes and jacarandas. "The perfect street tree must be quick growing, grow straight up, tolerate pruning, and have a root system that does not interfere with the underground systems or break the tar paving above," says Buff.

Indigenous trees don't qualify: they don't like pruning and they interfere with underground systems. This doesn't mean there are no indigenous trees in the city and suburbs. Rather, they are planted in parks and open spaces where their restrictions are not a problem.

Some of these parks are: the Kingston Frost Park on the border between Brixton and Auckland Park, The Wilds in Houghton and the Johannesburg Botanical Garden in Emmarentia.

To get a sense of the natural vegetation of early Johannesburg, the Melville Koppies Nature Reserve, visit the 67-hectare area just beyond the city centre, in Emmarentia. It was proclaimed a reserve in 1959 and a historical monument in 1968.

Trees don't just make the city look pretty, they have a real environmental function, says Buff. They control the greenhouse effect: when heat rises from the tar, trees act as a natural coolant. Carbon dioxide emitted from cars is taken in by trees and converted into oxygen. Trees also reduce noise levels.

So, does Johannesburg have enough trees? Yes, says Buff: "We have 1.2 million trees, which is sufficient, but we need more." Buff says there is an active programme of planting trees, especially in treeless suburbs. "Four years ago we planted 17 000 trees at Orange Farm, and on Arbor Day last August we planted 4 000 trees in Soweto."

A problem for tree planting in Soweto is that the sewer systems are close to the surface and the pavements are not wide enough to accommodate trees. "The pavements have to be a little over two metres wide to plant trees. In Alexandra, for instance, pavements are so narrow that you can't even get a wheelchair along them," says Buff. Instead, City Parks has offered homeowners trees to plant in their gardens in an effort to get more trees into the suburbs.

Johannesburg News Agency

One large gallery

BY LUCILLE DAVIE

Johannesburg's inner city is about to become one large art gallery, its buildings posted with giant murals chosen from entries to the "JHB Art City" competition.

The competition aims to "showcase the inner city as the hub and cultural centre of Africa's world-class city" by tying up with regeneration projects around the city and displaying art works on the sides of a range of buildings.

Greatly enlarged versions of art works will be exhibited from August on various sites, including on the Nelson Mandela Bridge, in Mary Fitzgerald and Gandhi squares, the new Metro Market, the Civic Theatre and Constitution Hill.

About 30 works will go up on the 12 sites, 15 chosen from entries submitted to the competition, and 15 from corporate collections.

South African artists who have had at least one solo or group show in the past three years, were invited to submit a maximum of two works on standard-sized canvasses. Recent and new works completed between January last year and May this year, were accepted.

The judging panel consists of Bongi Dhlomo, Natasha Fuller, Clive Kellner and Monna Mokoena. Works submitted from corporate collections will afford a rare glimpse of South African art works seldom seen by the general public.

All the chosen works will be scanned and then enlarged without distortion, to be displayed as massive murals on the sides of buildings or in billboard-style mountings. Originals of the chosen art works will be displayed at venues around the city.

The murals will remain displayed until the Cricket World Cup in March 2003, but the works will be changed annually.

In addition to making visual art easily accessible to the city's people and visitors complementary arts events in the public spaces at selected project locations will be performed.

Downtown attractions

The area's revival will come under the spotlight at the Jo'burg Best Practices Exhibition, one of the WSSD satellite events and conferences.

The exhibition, "Local action moves the world … from agenda to action", will provide concrete demonstrations of best practices in local governments and councils in South Africa and the rest of the world. It will be an important adjunct to the conference on local government and will run from 24 August to 4 September and be housed at the Electric Workshop, an old electrical power station and now a historical landmark in the Newtown Cultural Precinct.

Apart from exhibits by local and international participants there will also be a media centre, Internet café, travel desk and shebeen.

Mandy Jean Woods, Director of Communications, Marketing and Tourism for the City of Johannesburg, comments: "Moving beyond the static displays at the exhibition, we aim to re-affirm Johannesburg's stature as a world-class city in Africa, as well as a magnificent show-piece of urban revival.

"A free shuttle service is available to transport Johannesburg World Summit delegates to Newtown. From here a free ride in an open air bus will be offered to Johannesburg's main tourist attractions.

"From Newtown in the east, they can stop and shop at the Oriental Plaza, then move westwards through the city to Joubert Park to see the GreenHouse Project – a showcase among the city's sustainable development projects – and South Africa's finest art gallery.

"On the way back, they will pass the Carlton Centre, leading fashion, gold and diamond centres, as well as the corporate heartland of South Africa's mining industry."

The annual Arts Alive festival has also been timed to coincide with the Summit, and will take place in Newtown area. Conference delegates will be encouraged to end off their days by visiting the exhibition between 6 and 8pm when the Arts Alive events will begin.

Woods adds that that the exhibition is as much for delegates as for the people of Johannesburg. "Around 800 000 people come into Johannesburg to work each day. This exhibition presents a perfect opportunity for residents, schools and even visitors from neighbouring cities and towns to rediscover the manifold charms of this city. We also want Jo'burgers to see what is important about sustainable development."

The exhibition will also promote the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and other local government organisations. It will attract not only local and provincial government stakeholders, but also companies and individuals who operate in sustainable development environments.

Outside the city walls

BY LUCILLE DAVIE

It's Johannesburg's best-kept, back-to-nature secret: just 11 kilometres south of the city centre is an unspoilt 680-hectare stretch of open veld and koppies, filled with 150 species of birds, and around 650 indigenous plants and trees, with the pleasant Bloubosspruit flowing idly through it.

The Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve offers a network of trails, with guided walks and rambles up to nine kilometres long, conducted every second and fourth Sunday of the month.

The Reserve has an interesting history. In 1895 it was decided that the northern end of the Reserve could be walled to form a dam to supply the needs of the rapidly growing town.

The foundations of the dam wall - large stacked quartzite blocks located at the northern end of the Reserve - are still visible, and the river flows through the middle of the wall, down into the Reserve and out the other end, into the Klip River.

But four years later, in 1899, the Anglo Boer War broke out and the plans were permanently shelved.

The dam, referred to as the Vierfontein Dam Scheme, was to have had walls of 12 metres high, in line with the koppies on either side of the valley. Around £70 000 was spent on the dam before it was abandoned. The huge Vaal Dam, another 50 kilometres south, now supplies Johannesburg with water, augmented in the last decade by water from neighbouring Lesotho.

If the dam had been built, the suburbs of Mondeor, Alan Manor, Suideroord and Winchester Hills Ext 1 would not have existed. The Bloubospruit is fed by four feeder streams found in the koppies in the surrounding suburbs above the Reserve.

There has, for some time, been a clear divide between the northern and southern suburbs of Johannesburg. When the city centre experienced a decline in the early 1990s, businesses moved into the northern suburbs to areas like Sandton. The southern suburbs experienced a slump in development, epitomised in the decline in the use of recreation facilities like Wemmer Pan and the miniature town feature, Santarama Miniland, in La Rochelle.

The Pioneer Park Management Company is working on plans to revitalise the Wemmer Pan area, with a beer and tea garden, beach soccer and volleyball, and a skateboard park planned this year. A restaurant called Lake Marasquera Restaurant (Portuguese for 'restaurant on the lake') opened on 19 April at Wemmer Pan.

The Klipriviersberge – 'stone river mountains' – have a long history. Stone Age artefacts dating back 250 000 years have been found in the reserve, but no living sites have been found, suggesting that Stone Age people hunted in the reserve but didn't settle there.

Aerial photographs of the Reserve reveal 19 stone-walled Iron Age settlements dating from about 1500. A total of 90 sites have been identified in the broader area, suggesting a large, settled pastoral community.

These Tswana people lived on the koppies, building stone walls to surround their inner kraals and living areas, shaped rather like a sunflower. Cattle, their most important commodity, were housed in the inner circle, safe from predators. Each petal of the sunflower housed a different household, and between these enclosures were smaller enclosures housing smaller animals like calves, goats and chickens.

The outer walls reached around 1.5 metres in height, but over the years those walls have crumbled.

Excavations of nearby sites reveal that these people grew sorghum, raised cattle, sheep and goats, and hunted wild animals. Two sites in the Reserve were large – 150 metres by 50 metres – and would have housed up to 100 people in a single settlement, made up of 10 households.

These early settlements were vulnerable to changes in climate, and population size would have waned and revived over the years. The earlier settlements died out, and it was only in the 1700s that these groups re-established themselves in the Reserve.

These pastoralists traded with settlements at Melville Koppies, 25 kilometres to the north, who mined iron, not found down south. These peoples lived harmoniously but were overrun and wiped out in the early 1800s when ousted Zulu leader Mzilikazi moved into the area and established his kingdom.

Around 1850, Sarel Marais, one of the early Voortrekkers, and his family settled just above the Bloubosspruit, in the southern part of the Reserve. He built five elements of what characterised a typical 1850s farmstead: a farmhouse, a waenhuis or wagonhouse, an orchard, an irrigation furrow and a cemetery.

The simple rectangular farmhouse had a thatched roof, but a 1943 fire destroyed the roof, and it was replaced with corrugated iron. Another fire in mid-1980 destroyed most of the farmhouse, and now only the walls remain.

The single remaining wall of the wagonhouse provides an excellent example of pise-de-tere building technique: a 1.5 metre stone section with no mud cement, topped with a one metre mud brick section. The roof timbers consisted of right-angled yellow wood beams, combined with round poplar poles and held together with wooden pegs.

The orchard was established with peach, pear, fig and pomegranate trees, still visible in 1989 but now gone. The orchard was irrigated from the river by means of a wier and sluice gates. The low stone wall and two entrance stones marking the orchard are still evident.

It is believed that Marais also planted a vineyard but it no longer exists. The peaches were used for making Witblitz, a local schnapps, and the poplars that were planted were used for building and fences.

The family cemetery still exists, some 500 metres north of the house, now overgrown and vandalised. Sarel Marais' grave is in the cemetery. He died in 1897, aged 83.

A diary from the time indicates that lion, caracal, lynx and genet were found on the farm. Mountain rhebuck, duiker, jackal, mongoose, porcupine and dassie now live in the Reserve.

Marais' son Jakob took over the farm when his father died, but since Jakob had no sons (he had 10 daughters from two marriages), he sold the farm in 1917 to the Quilliam family. They developed the farm, successfully farming dairy, and had 10 000 pigs, growing lucerne, barley, and mielies.

Myrtle Coward, a second-generation Quilliam family member who grew up on the farm, describes her childhood as "absolutely wonderful". The orchard just below the farmhouse was flourishing in the 1930s. Lilian Thompson, Myrtle's sister, says: "fruits of every letter of the alphabet were grown in the orchard".

The City Council bought the farm around 1950, after most of the Quilliam family had left and grandfather Quilliam had died. His wife remained on the farm until it became unsafe for her to stay. Since she moved out in the mid-1980s, the farmhouse has burnt down and been vandalised, and all that remains are the walls.

Malcolm Holman, committee member of the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve Association, grew up in the area and used to walk past the farmhouse on his way to hiking in the koppies

"a feel for unspoilt Africa"

with his friends. "I remember that grandmother Quilliam used to dash inside when she saw us coming down the road, and come out with cookies and lemonade for us."

The Reserve was proclaimed in 1984. It has several access points: the one near the farmhouse is on Impala Drive; one through the Recreation Centre on Peggy Vera Road; and the most popular one, via Frandaph Drive in Mondeor, where the old dam wall is located.

The Reserve consists mostly of grassland, interspersed with indigenous shrubs and trees and rocky outcrops. It has a rich diversity of birdlife – 150 birds have been spotted. More than 600 plant species have been identified, including more than 50 trees, together with a range of grasses.

One tree, the Buffalo Thorn, has several uses. "Its bark is used as a poultice for sprains," says Morne Brits, conservation consultant and Reserve Association member. It also has symbolic value, says Brits, in that the branches are cut and put on graves. There are paired thorns at the base of the leaves, the upward-pointing thorn symbolising the future, and the downward thorn referring to the ancestors.

Furthermore, it is felt that it is safe to shelter under the tree in a storm, as lightning won't strike the tree. The leaves can be made into a tea or stewed, for use as an aphrodisiac.

The Reserve is run by the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve Association, with some 400 members, in conjunction with the Johannesburg City Council and Gauteng Nature Conservation. When a problem is identified, like pollution in the river or alien wattle trees growing next to the river, the Association organises a work party and the area is cleared.

Gauteng supplies a manager and 20 workers, who work seven days a week on clearing alien shrubs and weeds, and cutting fire breaks.

The Reserve has a network of trails running through it, the two longest ranging from 5.8 kilometres to nine kilometres. Organised walks take place every second and fourth Sunday of the month.

Ecodad, an organisation specialising in environmental education, arranges a fun day on Environment Day in June. Visitors are given route maps, answering questions as they walk around the Reserve, and prizes are given.

Twice a year the Association organises Spring and Autumn days which consist of three-hour walks followed by a social braai (barbecue). Mountain biking and cross-country groups also enjoy the trails through the Reserve.

At present stables are being established by the River Rangers that will house horses to be used in horse trails as well as for security patrols around the Reserve.

Long-term plans for the Reserve are to build a replica of a Tswana village, restore the homestead and fence the Reserve.

The first stage of this plan, to build a demonstration hut, manned by Tswana people, has been approved, and it is hoped it will be ready for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, together with trained guides.

Further down the line there is a plan to build a bridge across the Bloubosspruit to allow visitors who start their walks from the Recreation Centre in the southern end of the Reserve, to cross the river in all seasons and move up into the koppies. Eventually it is hoped that a wheelchair-accessible trail will be created, in addition to easy-to-manage paths to cater for the very young and the very old.

More immediate plans are to protect plant species, in particular Cineraria longipes, a Red Data (most endangered) species, from destruction. Making the present trails more accessible, and in the process preventing further erosion, are also top priorities.

The Reserve is unfenced and is used by local residents to walk their dogs. It is used as a thoroughfare between Mondeor in the north and Kibler Park in the south. But, says, Brits, no incidents of vandalism of parked cars or mugging of people, have been reported.

Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve, little known to northern suburbs residents, gives visitors "a feel for unspoilt Africa", says Brits.

Perhaps those southerners are deliberately keeping it their secret.

Johannesburg News Agency

Soweto showcase

BY THOMAS THALE

A showcase project to restore a Soweto dam and the adjacent park has rekindled community spirit among local residents. The upgrading of the neglected Moroka Dam and Thokoza Park, once prime attractions of Rockville, Soweto, is a R20-million mayoral showcase project.

"The community was involved right from the moment of conception," says Lindelani Mathebula, community liaison officer for the upgrade. "This has made local people excited about this project. The mood is one of optimism. This project has really brought Rockville alive."

The ambitious programme includes desilting the dam, removing a large portion of the reeds that have provided cover for criminals, revamping the catchment area of the dam and landscaping the park, replacing alien growth with indigenous trees.

Neville J Smith, Deputy Director, Environmental Policy for the City of Johannesburg, says restoration of this recreational facility will uplift the community by "providing a sense of place".

The dam was created in 1960 by the construction of an earth embankment under Vundla Drive. Some of the older residents of Rockville have fond memories of this period. "This park used to be clean until the 1980s," says Sam Morake, a long-time Rockville resident. "We used to swim here and come here for picnics. This was the main meeting place of socialites from Rockville and the surrounding areas."

For both Morake and Richard Kweyiya, from nearby White City Jabavu, the restoration of the park is an opportunity for the community to rediscover its positive social values.

"Look at those children," Kweyiya says, pointing at a group of young kids playing on the construction site. "Where are their parents? If they get injured, they will turn around and blame the government. Our people must start taking responsibility for their actions. We must take collective responsibility not only for this park but for the wellbeing of these kids."

Morake nods vigorously in agreement.

During years of neglect, the dam and the park itself deteriorated badly. This physical degradation gave rise to moral decay as the park was taken over by criminal elements.

"It was no longer safe to come to the park," says Eugene Thusi, of Rockville. "Women have been raped here and people mugged by thugs hiding in those long reeds. Cars were also regularly hijacked."

His friend Sike Mkhize agrees. "Security must be provided in this area, especially at night."

The two friends blame poor maintenance in the past for the deterioration of the park. "Only one old man worked here during the day. He tried his best to keep the park clean, but he could not remove the debris from the dam," Thusi says.

> "We are excited about this development."

But now "we are excited about development. The whole community has been galvanised to guard the area."

There is much work to be done. The dam was silted up because the surrounding roads had not been properly surfaced, says resident engineer Cass Bhamiee.

"A section of the park was also used as an ash dump site. The surrounding roads also had a poor storm water reticulation system, resulting in soil erosion."

Dealing with those problems is high on the agenda – the footpaths running across the parks will be paved – and security also has a high priority.

"We will build curbs on the roads surrounding the park, build humps on all roads to make them safer for children, provide lighting on the park, fix street lights and high masts in the area," Bhamjiee says.

Two young Rockville residents watch construction workers rebuilding Moroka Dam.

Included in the project are designated play areas for children, a rehabilitation of the stream edge and construction of access ramps, steps and entrances.

Landscaping is a crucial part of the project. With the removal of alien vegetation through the Working for Water Programme, and replanting of indigenous trees, the existing biodiversity in the area will be enhanced.

"Many of the streams leading into the dam will be naturally shaped and interspersed with rocks," explains Smith, "creating suitable habitats for riparian vegetation and macro-invertebrates to re-colonise." The restoration of the dam and surrounding park will result in an overall improvement of water quality in the dam.

Project manager Andre Nel says the restoration of the park will be completed by 10 August. That is well before delegates arrive for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. "We are on track to meet the deadline. Everything is going according to plan," he says.

In the immediate term, the project has provided about 150 jobs, mostly for locals, and local contractors have also benefitted. "We made sure that jobs go to semi-skilled people from the ward and that we have a fair geographical spread in the allocation of jobs," says Mandla Ndumo, the ward councillor for the area.

He says the park is earmarked to be one of Soweto's prime tourist attractions. "We are working on a plan to enable artists to sell their craft from the park. The park will serve not only as a recreational facility but also to generate income for the community."

Ndumo promises that criminals will find it difficult to operate from the newly revamped park.

"As a member of the Community Policing Forum, I have worked on various projects to rehabilitate criminals. I communicate with Superintendent Ngubeni, the station commander of Moroka Police Station, and he has undertaken to provide visible policing of the park on an ongoing basis."

The area falls under ward 33, also referred to as Dr Moroka ward, named after Dr James Moroka, the famous former president of the African National Congress who spearheaded the move of the ANC towards militancy in the early 1950s. The name therefore conjures up images of this rich social history.

The Moroka dam looks set to be restored to its pristine condition, and the community to the founding principles of selflessness championed by Dr Moroka.

Johannesburg News Agency

A dent in the despair

BY LUCILLE DAVIE

The sprawling shack settlement of Ivory Park once epitomised hopelessness. But since 1999, small but steady dents have been made in that despair, thanks to initiatives that have looked more closely at the damaged environment and how local people could live more harmoniously with it.

Ivory Park is midway between Johannesburg and Pretoria, to the east of Midrand. Half the Ivory Park community are unemployed; those who are employed earn on average less than R800 per month.

Serious environmental problems have taken their toll on the health of the community members. Coal is used for cooking, causing respiratory problems. A highly polluted river – more polluted than water reaching sewage farms – runs through the area. The pipes feeding the area are riddled with leaks, with 30% of the water residents pay for going to waste.

A hopeless situation by anyone's standards. But in the early nineties two incidents occurred that were to change the township: a dangerous chemical fire broke out at a nearby warehouse and a hazardous waste dump was proclaimed for an adjoining neighbourhood.

Earthlife Africa heard of these incidents, and offered assistance. A community forum was established, which lobbied the Danish Agency for Environment and Development for funding, and was given R11-million.

The result was the Midrand EcoCity Trust. One of its first jobs was to commission a State of the Environment report to examine existing conditions in Midrand, the broader area encompassing Ivory Park and other nearby townships.

The report gives an overview of the environmental situation in Midrand, including pollution statistics for air, water, land and noise, as well as detailed recommendations for the area.

The EcoCity Initiative came out of this. It is an effort to create a local economy along sustainable development principles, where the community create their own jobs by growing organic vegetables; cleaning their environment and managing the waste. The community are also educated on enviro-friendly living.

"The EcoCity Initiative is a holistic programme, addressing poverty from a community, social and economic development level," says Anne Sugrue, MD of the Midrand EcoCity Trust.

The secret to the success of the initiative was community involvement by means of co-operatives, reinforced by a need to eradicate local health problems. Women and young people were targeted, creating jobs for them and focusing their energies on their immediate surroundings.

"It is anticipated that this approach will lead to a sustainable local economy that is less dependent on outside inputs and capital intensity," adds Sugrue.

A number of innovative projects are in place and working smoothly:

Over 70 farmers, mostly women, are growing organic food for the community. Six agricultural co-operatives have been formed. Forty people have been employed in waste collection and waste sorting. Ten people are employed in making paper from waste paper and alien vegetation. An eco village consisting of 30 houses is partially built. Some 14

women have been trained in eco-building technologies like grey waste water treatment and water harvesting.

A pilot project involving the Ecocity and Eskom, and using various energy efficient measures in houses in the area, is up and running. It involves installing insulated ceilings, geyser jackets, long-life, low-voltage light bulbs, and solar water heaters. Residents' reactions confirm savings in energy costs, and the programme is being expanded.

Smokeless braziers have been introduced in an effort to reduce air pollution in homes and the broader community.

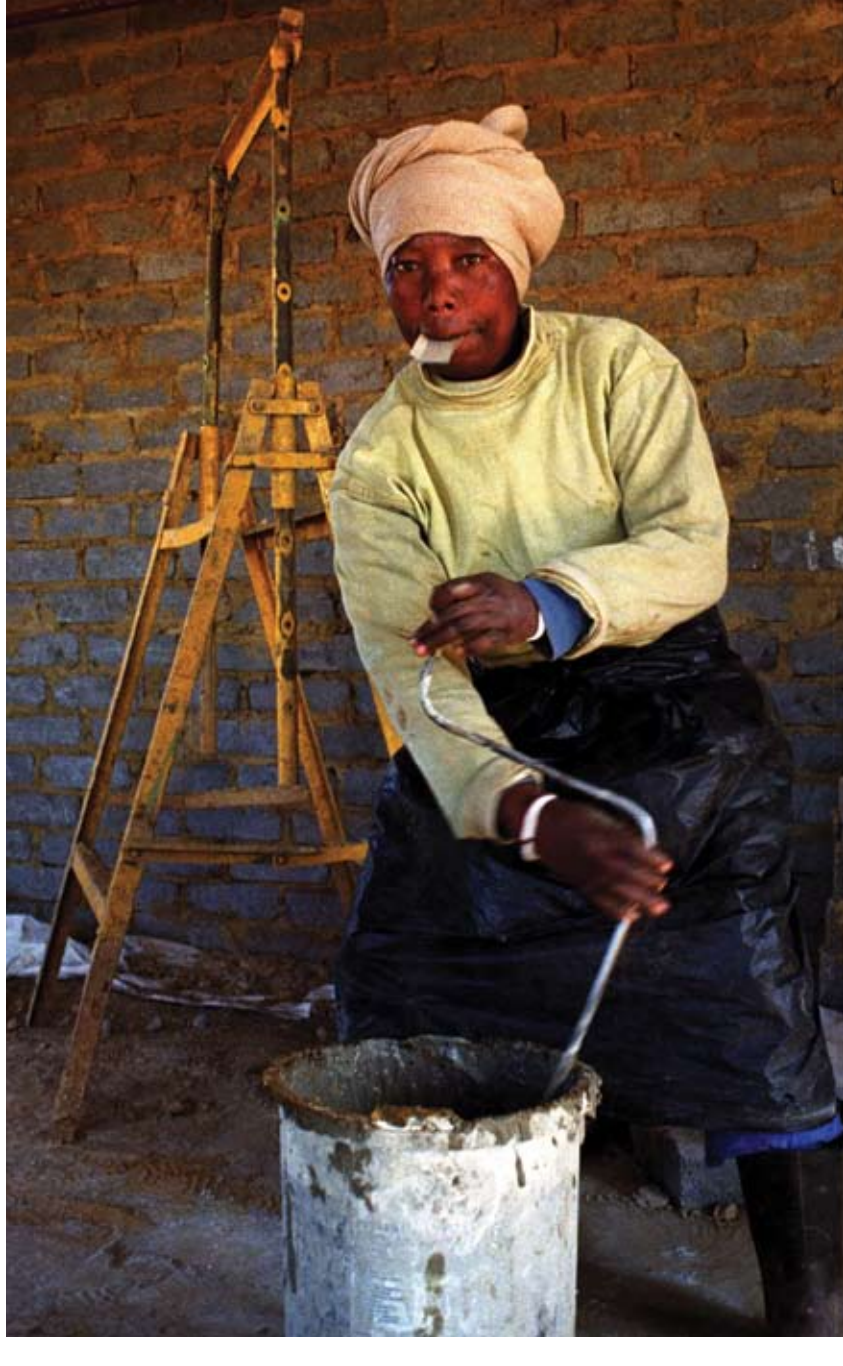
A six kilometre bicycle track linking schools in the area is being built, with funding of R1-million from the department of transport. Eight young people have been running a bicycle refurbishment and sales workshop, importing used bikes from the UK, Holland, the US and China. Some 1 200 school children have undergone an edu-bike programme, and an Ivory Park Racing Bike Association has been formed, with 30 youngsters training and entering cycle races like The Argus and the 94.7 kilometre Johannesburg race.

"What we have tried to demonstrate is that there is a different way of creating jobs," explains Sugrue. So far 150 jobs have been created. There are plans to build a zero-energy community centre and an energy demonstration centre, as part of the broader EcoCity concept. Pamphlets, brochures, a photo exhibition and a short video are being prepared, detailing the concept, in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in August. These will be on display at the energy demonstration centre.

Over 800 Ivory Park school children have undergone an educational programme to raise awareness on sustainable development and its relevance to their lives. This resulted in a cleanest school competition, an ongoing feature of the area.

And the cherry on top: the polluted Kaalspruit, the river which runs through the township, is to be cleaned up.

Johannesburg News Agency



The big smoke
Smoke from coal braziers create an unhealthy haze. Mielie sellers gather to light their braziers in downtown Johannesburg.

money well spent says Jo'burg

Johannesburg could spend up to R65-million on hosting the 70 000 visitors expected to attend the fortnight-long World Summit on Sustainable Development. Many residents wonder whether this is appropriate use of city resources. All that money on a jamboree for foreign visitors? The summit benefits Johannesburg in a great many ways, says the head of media liaison for the city, Tasneem Carrim, who lists five reasons why it will boost the city's economy:

1. Much of the world's media will focus on the summit during the critical fortnight, which will raise the city's international profile. This will have long-term benefits for investment and tourism. There are plenty of precedents, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, to confirm the power of a single, large international event to put a city on the world map.

2. The arrival of 70 000 visitors, all armed with foreign exchange, will have huge benefits for retail in the city – everything from taxis to restaurants, curio shops, museums, Internet cafes and entertainment venues.

3. The summit has provided a catalyst for much-needed upgrades to city infrastructure. Most of these upgrade projects were already in the pipeline – but it required the urgency of the summit deadline to speed along their execution.

4. New businesses have been established to organise the summit, for example the Johannesburg World Summit Company, thus creating employment. The infrastructure upgrades have created new opportunities to employ the city's poor: building roads, digging trenches for drains and clearing away waste to make way for green areas.

5. The summit has helped focus the local public on issues of sustainable development. There is now a far more widespread understanding that sustainability has relevance to our daily lives.

How exactly is the city spending the R65-million? These are some examples:

- Construction of new roads will cost R4,75-million. The widening of Sandton's roads, for example, will have immediate benefits for the tens of thousands of commuters stuck in traffic jams each morning.
- Major repairs have been done to sewers in the neighbourhood of key summit venues to cope with the massive population influx. The sewer upgrades will benefit residents of Sandton, where the population has exploded way beyond the limits of existing infrastructure.
- City Power has increased lighting in problem areas at a cost of R220 000.
- Metrobus will be providing R4,2-million worth of new buses (plus R300 000 worth of management).
- The metropolitan police will work overtime to ensure maximum service. This will cost R4-million in overtime pay.
- Ambulance and fire services will also be on constant stand-by, which will mean an overtime bill of R2,5-million.
- Pikitup staff will work R750 000 worth of overtime. Pikitup also expects to spend R2,1-million in regular operations, plus another R2-million on recycling.
- Parks that will be improved include Masupha/Ben Naude in Diepkloof, at a cost of R805 000; Van Onselen in Meadlowlands West (R690 000); Marlboro Drive and Rivonia Road in Sandton, at R200 000 each; and Katherine Street, also in Sandton, for R105 000.
- The budget for upgrading the historic Turbine Hall in Newtown, where some summit activities will be held, is R5-million.
- Johannesburg Roads Agency allotted R1,5-million to upgrading traffic lights last year, plus another half million for this year. Some R750 000 has been spent on road markings; another R650 000 is budgeted.
- R1,4-million will be spent on environmental issues, which includes health inspections at all accommodation and leisure venues.

Johannesburg News Agency

Sustainable culture

The medium and the message

BY TRACEY NAUGHTON

Sustainability is often thought to have three dimensions – economic, social and environmental. A growing body of thought acknowledges a fourth – that of cultural sustainability. I would go further and assert that sustainable development and a flourishing culture are interdependent. But culture, like development and sustainability, is one of those hard-to pin-down terms often narrowly defined to mean either 'the arts' or 'traditional' practices.

A cursory glance at Southern African newspapers at best affirms the above interpretation and at worst has a cultural framework at the bottom of the analytical ladder, swamped by the prevalence of economic analysis. It is a regional tension in journalism that for a journalist to be able to view a story through a variety of lenses, a broad liberal arts education is needed. Yet many practising journalists are not qualified at all. Given the role of the journalist as a reflection of society and the importance of this role in democratic development, this locates the need for on the job training.

More broadly interpreted, culture is an agreed set of values held by a society. The value system that we hear most about in the media is the one that single-mindedly promotes consumption. Is this a reflection of the society that we live in or is it a reflection of the views of a financially powerful minority? Yet in day to day interaction, especially among the least powerful members of our society there is a palpable interplay of another set of values, not reflected in the mainstream media, that focuses on good, not goods.

Consider the dichotomy of the village based rural woman who's values are reflected in her nurturing the three children of her brother and his wife who died of Aids, watching a soap opera where a sister kills a brother in a bid to take control of the Haute Couture Fashion House inherited from their father. What is offered by this content to the rural woman? A sense of aspiration? More likely a sense of disempowerment when she compares her life, the one not on television, to the life that is on television.

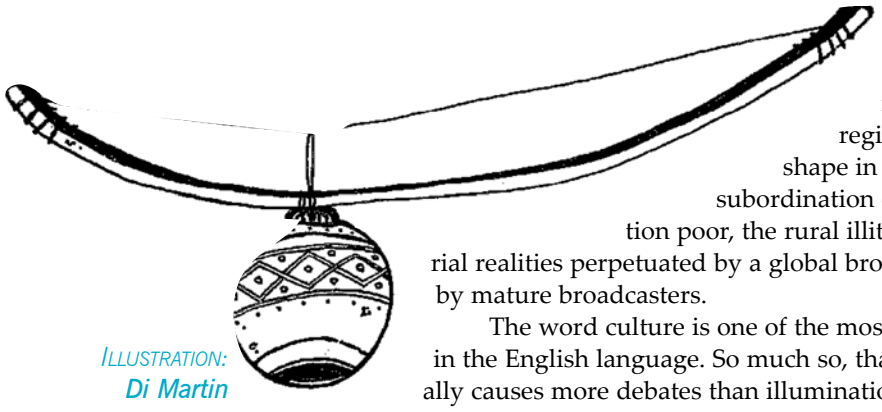


ILLUSTRATION: Di Martin

I used the dichotomy of the villager and the soap opera because it is important for intellectuals to register how general issues take shape in ordinary people's lives. The subordination of the majority, of the information poor, the rural illiterate, of women are very material realities perpetuated by a global broadcast environment dominated by mature broadcasters.

The word culture is one of the most complex and contested words in the English language. So much so, that revisiting its meaning usually causes more debates than illumination. Without delving too deeply into the mass of scholarly literature that has developed around the world, two inter-related definitions stand out. They are:

The social production and transmission of identities, meanings, knowledge, beliefs, values, aspirations, memories, purposes, attitudes and understanding;

The 'way of life' of a particular set of human beings: customs, faiths and conventions; codes of manners, dress, cuisine, language, arts, science, technology, religion and rituals; norms and regulations of behaviour, traditions and institutions.

So, culture is both the medium and the message – the inherent values and the means and the results of social expression. Culture enfolds every aspect of human intercourse: the family, the education, legal, political and transport systems, the mass media, work practices, welfare programs, leisure pursuits, religion, the built environment.

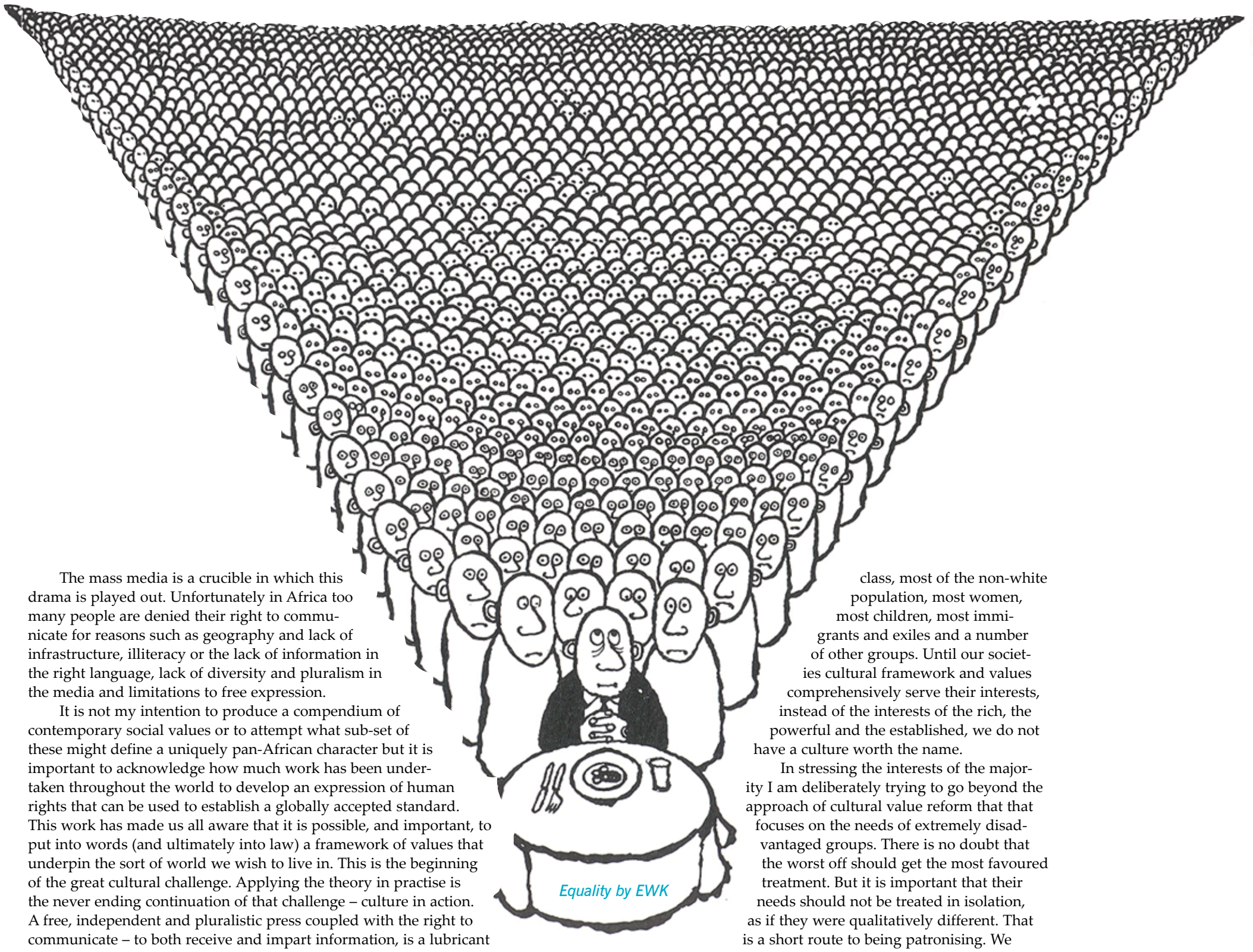
It may appear that this culture is such an all-embracing concept that it can have little practical use in the reality of life in Africa. Looking at the above, the question is no longer "What is culture?" but "what isn't?". It covers both the values upon which a society is based and the embodiments and expressions of these values in the day-to-day world of that society.

In this framework, the media is the medium and the message and both these dimensions are a reflection of the culture of the society in which they are located. I am confident that a consistent application of this view of culture offers new pathways to achieving many of the aims expressed in current governance and democratisation debates in the context of our nascent democracies. In Africa we are subjected daily to the cultural values of external societies, we, the 'under-developed' have insufficient information with which to see the values practised in the lives of the desperate as having value to the kind of society we would like to be part of.

> "Culture is not the decoration added after a society has dealt with its basic needs. Culture is the basic need – it is the bedrock of society."

Culture is not the decoration added after a society has dealt with its basic needs. Culture is the basic need – it is the bedrock of society. The media is centre stage in daily reflection of a society's culture. Its very production and transmission is an act of public intervention. All acts of public intervention are informed by sets of values. Sometimes these values are formally expressed, more often, they are simply assumed. Sometimes it is even denied that they exist at all. (This last position is not one I intend to debate. To me it is self evident that the 'market' is not a 'natural' phenomenon. It is an artifice constructed by humans, and as such, embodies the values of its creators in exactly the same way any other construct does.)

I take it as self evident that humans feel it necessary to make sense of their lives and to conduct themselves on the basis of that sense. This process and its results manifest themselves as a value system – a culture. One of the biggest issues that any society has to face is the role of the state in the shaping of the values that inform the government, and more fundamentally the values of the entire society.



Equality by EWK

The mass media is a crucible in which this drama is played out. Unfortunately in Africa too many people are denied their right to communicate for reasons such as geography and lack of infrastructure, illiteracy or the lack of information in the right language, lack of diversity and pluralism in the media and limitations to free expression.

It is not my intention to produce a compendium of contemporary social values or to attempt what sub-set of these might define a uniquely pan-African character but it is important to acknowledge how much work has been undertaken throughout the world to develop an expression of human rights that can be used to establish a globally accepted standard. This work has made us all aware that it is possible, and important, to put into words (and ultimately into law) a framework of values that underpin the sort of world we wish to live in. This is the beginning of the great cultural challenge. Applying the theory in practise is the never ending continuation of that challenge – culture in action. A free, independent and pluralistic press coupled with the right to communicate – to both receive and impart information, is a lubricant of societies values.

If journalists do not have an analysis that locates their work in a cultural framework they run the very real risk of being a mouthpiece for the elite strata of society that own much of the media. There is no privileged source, no well spring, no primary-producers of our culture. Cultural production goes on all the time, everywhere. The shape that it takes – what activities are honoured, funded, institutionalised; what is stressed in the education system and media and what is not; what symbols become dominant and which ones don't – is profoundly affected by the general structure of power and inequality in society.

The impact of class is the most familiar example of this general principle, but as contemporary feminism has shown, it is not the only one. If you look back at the names of the cultural heroes in Africa, you will notice that all of them are men. The storehouse of our intellectual wisdom is a men's house. Women are admitted only to the less sacred parts, or in rigidly limited roles. The cultural forms that have largely been created or sustained by women – and there are a good many of them, ranging from clothmaking, sewing and embroidery, pottery, a variety of design and decorative arts, and cookery in a hundred forms, to oral arts such as songs, storytelling and so on – are heavily discounted by the values of a male dominated society. The collective power of men does not obliterate women's creativity, but it does profoundly affect the value that is placed on it, the attention it is given by our media, cultural and educational institutions and the difficulties women face in gaining audiences, influence and income.

For most issues of public policy we use the criterion of the interests of the majority. That is the standard that we should also use for judging issues of culture. The majority in Africa, in most ways are not powerful, are not privileged, are not cushioned by property, qualifications, connections or institutional arrangements. This includes most of the working class, most of the non-white population, most women, most children, most immigrants and exiles and a number of other groups. Until our societies cultural framework and values comprehensively serve their interests, instead of the interests of the rich, the powerful and the established, we do not have a culture worth the name.

In stressing the interests of the majority I am deliberately trying to go beyond the approach of cultural value reform that that focuses on the needs of extremely disadvantaged groups. There is no doubt that the worst off should get the most favoured treatment. But it is important that their needs should not be treated in isolation, as if they were qualitatively different. That is a short route to being patronising. We must bear in mind that the systems of class, gender and ethnic inequality 'disadvantage' the majority of people.

Only policies that address the needs of the mass of the people are likely to win and keep widespread political support. This is not to imply that the majority is a homogenous group rather that civil society is a coalition of groups and forces that can rally in support of policies that reflect the values of the majority of people.

Just as biodiversity is an essential component of ecological sustainability, so is cultural diversity essential to social sustainability. Diverse values should not be respected just because we want to define ourselves as tolerant, but because we must have a pool of diverse perspectives in order to survive, to adapt to changing conditions, to embrace the future.

And it is not simply the discourse between diverse values that will stimulate our communities to discover new visions. The diversity of mediums of expression and of cultural manifestations are both essential parts of life's rich tapestry and invaluable tools with which to engage with the challenges that will inevitably confront us.

It may require emphasising that cultural diversity is a fact of life; the challenge for the state, and for citizens, is to ensure that this diversity is expressed, reflected, acknowledged, indeed valorised in the mainstream of African life. For this to occur, significant changes to the power relations within our society will have to occur – cultural democracy involves the exercise of rights, not simply the availability of opportunity. There are many sectors of our society, and many perspectives within these, that do not enjoy an airing in the public arena; addressing this inequality will need strategies that are courageous, inclusive and culturally aware.

In this argument, the media is a cornerstone to cultural and social sustainability and one of the greatest challenges of our transitional time, is to ensure that media personnel have the tools to bring a cultural analysis to bear one the production of information.

We need info-structure

Tracey Naughton is Regional Broadcast Programme Manager of the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

In April 1998 a Unesco Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, "The Power of Culture" held in Stockholm, endorsed an action plan which contains key principles for media practitioners seeking a guiding beacon for their role in culture, and its role in a sustainable society.

"The Power of Culture" (www.unesco-sweden.org/Conference/Action_Plan.htm) recognised two key principles that inform media advocacy in Africa:

- Principle 7: New trends, particularly globalisation, link cultures ever more closely and enrich the interaction between them, but they may also be detrimental to creative diversity and to cultural pluralism; they make mutual respect all the more imperative.
- Principle 11: The defence of local and regional cultures threatened by cultures with a global reach must not transform the cultures thus affected into relics deprived of their own development dynamics.

The conference affirmed that:

- Effective participation in the information society and the mastery by everyone of information and communications technology constitute a significant dimension of any cultural policy; and
- Governments should endeavour to achieve closer partnerships with civil society in the design and implementation of cultural policies that are integrated into development strategies.

The conference recommended to member states that they adopt a broader vision of national cultural policy which fits locally and includes civic society participation as well as the media.

African media practitioners have recently expanded on these principles in the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, in developing the African Charter on Broadcasting (www.misa.org).

The communication rights of the information poor will not be enhanced simply by policies of infrastructure roll out, if the relationship between the institution and the audience isn't basically changed. So a committed media development activist takes a film to a village setting and powered by a diesel generator and projected on a floral bed sheet, the local population turns out to see one of the few audio visual projections of their lifetime. I don't wish to denigrate the sincere intent of this outreach activity, but in reality, next week, it's business as usual, with urban populations accessing cinemas and television and the rural folk watching the fire.

We must recognise the important limitations of policies that try to democratise information simply by expanding access to the same product. Such ideas need to be central to the development of the infostructure that is the means of access to information. Here it must be noted that while the idea of convergence at village level, and a computer terminal in every village, that provides access to broadcast content and the Internet is in theory technically achievable given the required resources, this reality is a good distance away.

Immediately we need to use broadcasting to serve the public interest, better than is the case now. Perhaps this will mean advocating for more accessible use of satellite technology for it has the reach that will be required to deliver content to the information poor. How will this be achieved in a media environment where profit not public interest is the driver of development and outreach?

Here in lies a great challenge for media activists. Exclusion is a passive put-down, but broadcast content also radiates active messages about who and who is not, important. This is broadcasting mobilised in support of economic inequality. Broadcast content is not neutral – it is a means of exclusion and a support of social and cultural privilege.

It seems to me that to be democratic and to develop and sustain social democracy, broadcasting must be a patchwork of content that reflects society, its diversity and its diversity of needs. A mix of brain food and entertainment that includes representation of the majority of people whose reality is not seen on TV.

We're all familiar with the horror stories about cultural programmes in history – the 'socialist realism' that meant glorification of Stalin, the Ministry of Propaganda that Goebbels wanted to be called the Ministry of Culture. No-one wants a re-run of that but sadly there are African governments who resist pressure to transform their national broadcast systems to ones where there is a diversity of voices and pluralism of ownership.

This isn't the only form of cultural control. Unless we are prepared to be completely passive in the face of Macdonaldisation and Readers Digestion, we have to declare what kinds of things we are against. And unless we want to be completely negative, we also have to say what kinds of things we are for. This can be difficult for people who have only known commercial or state radio. People don't wake up one morning and think "I am going to exercise my right to communicate today – I'll start a community radio station." This is a development dilemma with a long history, but again, existing media could play a significant role in developing a culture of tolerance, in giving life to the right to communicate and in the process building the kind of democracies that African people would be proud of. It goes without saying that the mature democracies of the world while they offer a framework for democracy, are not necessarily suitable to be grafted on to developing nations through aid programmes and international interventions.

Reporting indigenous knowledge

The choices they deserve

Priscilla Boshoff is a student in the Higher Diploma in Journalism programme at Rhodes University. She has a degree in anthropology and has lived in India, China and Japan.

BY PRISCILLA BOSHOFF

A few days ago, an interesting article dealing with community development and education came close to being published in a national newspaper. But the editor tossed it back at the surprised journalist, and told him to write it again. Here are some excerpts:

> *Researchers here have recently been facilitating local people to rediscover traditional practices that have been lost through the processes of colonisation and changes in lifestyles. "We are very excited about the ways in which things are being discovered," said Samuel Mann, research facilitator at the project. "People are beginning to reclaim some of the ways of knowing that still have meaning and relevance to modern every day life. People are rediscovering the importance of Indigenous Knowledge."*
>
> *Mba Ngcobo, one of the participants in the project, showed how he and other members of his community had built a grain pit using old traditional knowledge. "It works really well," he said, "it is amazing how these old ways really work. Our ancestors had marvellous ways of doing things. We can really appreciate the skills that are slowly being lost to us."*
>
> *Mann explained how the traditional pit storage method produced carbon dioxide that keeps the grain fresh and insect-free for months. "Carbon dioxide storage is now the preferred way of many milling and storage companies to keep grain. It keeps grain fresh without having to resort to insecticides."*

What's the problem?

What could be wrong with this? It uses voices from both participants and facilitator. The local community has a chance to explain to the wider public an important aspect of culture that has been given new life. The public is informed and everyone has learned something form the exercise. The facilitator does not claim to speak for the community. The participants in the project seem pleased. And we can say some wise things about how old practices really do have some scientific methods behind them. What could the editor possibly be on about?

Perhaps it is necessary to take a few steps back and start again. Researchers have been working for several years now on formulating processes through which indigenous knowledge can be re-appropriated by local communities in a way that informs and enriches the everyday life of all South Africans.

"We must be careful when we define indigenous knowledge," says Rob O'Donoghue, lecturer in environmental education at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. "It is what we could call 'cultural capital', the knowledge that we use to respond to and mobilise our society and environment as it changes around us. In a very meaningful way, it is a lifestyle choice."

It is easy for 'indigenous knowledge' to become stereotyped and marked as something quaint, and "out there", a curiosity, a thing that we might talk about in abstract terms, as having any practical validity, as lending quality and meaning to the choices we make everyday within our own particular context.

How else would we be able to describe the traditional grainpit? It is certainly curious, in the old-fashioned sense of marvellous and deserving of attention. Its mechanism is impressive, and beyond a doubt people must have known what they were doing when they built them; but where are we going to have the chance to use one, let alone build one?

What about the community? Why should they have to build a pit lined with grass and dung for grain storage? Wouldn't they prefer to have a more convenient and hygienic way of storing corn? Maybe they don't have electricity to control a large storage site – hey, that's terrible. Someone ought to do something about providing this community with the basics. This is a development issue!

The impact of colonisation

It certainly is a development issue. Generations have undergone the painful and humiliating process of physical and mental colonisation. Along with the appropriation of land and natural resources has come eradication of the ways of thought and meaning-making that went into constructing a world that worked for the communities that generated them.

The scientific rationalism of the coloniser, with no knowledge or care for how the local people understood and interacted with their social and environmental "habitus", was the need to destroy what they perceived to be "undeveloped", "barbaric" and "superstitious" behaviours so they could garner political control.

When they found a useful practice, it was explained away using empirical, positivist terms of scientific ideology, robbing the practice of its groundedness and meaning in the culture from which it came, effectively appropriating it for the scientific and technological use of the coloniser.

Take for example the problem of tsetse flies, carriers of the ancient enemy of cattle herders: sleeping sickness. Wild game are effectively immune. The flies stay with the game, hiding on their dark underbellies and in the shade of trees. When game and cattle come into contact, the flies infect the cattle.

In the days before restrictions on movement, land clearing and game hunting, Nguni cattle herders would drive away the big game from an area before moving their cattle in. This kept their animals out of the immediate range of the flies. But when the colonial government introduced laws that regulated how they thought the people "ought" to behave, protecting game, living in harmony with nature, there was a huge increase in the number of cases of the disease as the parasite-infested game returned to areas previously claimed by the herders.

The colonial government was not interested in the locals' explanation of what they did or had done to control the disease. They wanted to know why. Science and technology provided the answer – microscopic parasites. Scientists and institutions came to know more and better

ILLUSTRATIONS:
Di Martin

than those who were affected by the problem. Ways of knowing why superseded ways of knowing what to do. Moreover, communities were excluded from knowledge creation processes, and had to begin looking to outsiders to inform them how to deal with problems that affected them.

The challenge facing indigenous knowledge (IK) researchers now is how to work together with communities to try to bring out the hidden capital of cultural practice and reintroduce it as one of many ways in which people can choose to mobilise their world.

The government is also concerned about how to define and contain the "problem" of indigenous knowledge. In many parts of the world, it is felt that science and technology have failed to bring about poverty relief, to alleviate environmental degradation or to facilitate sustainable development. Now the trend is to consider local rural communities as having some understanding and communion with nature that the West has simply failed to grasp. Much of the hype centred around IK internationally is the idea that local peoples are repositories of ancient, valuable knowledge and skills that only need to be "discovered".

While it is true that many traditional farming techniques, soil conservation practices and ethno-veterinarian medicine have millennia of use to support the argument of sustainable coexistence with nature, it is perhaps more true that the utopian green stereotyping of indigenous communities only contributes to the burden of stereotypical impositions that continuously weigh down their fight to integrate daily life within wider society.

Lynette Masuku, a researcher in IK working for the National Parks Board in the KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa, has some hard-hitting criticisms about the ways in which media have exploited stereotypical depictions of the San peoples.

"I think there needs to be a shift in mindset and less glorifying of the San as children of nature who need to be 'agh, shamed!'. They should be treated as people who can chart their own destiny. Media need to be less romanticist and more direct about issues that are detrimental to the livelihoods of the San," said Masuku.

Other development researchers point to the way that poverty and the lure of foreign currency lead rural peoples to plunder their environment on behalf of local and overseas bioprospectors.

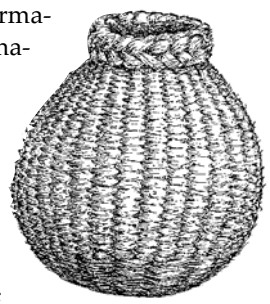
A recent case in the Grahamstown area of South Africa, reported in the *Daily Dispatch*, involved a local man removing thousands of indigenous plants, traditionally used as a natural remedy for various ailments, at the instigation of what is believed to be a French company. The trend is not confined to the hotly debated area of indigenous science and medicine. Foreign agents also "buy up" the performance rights of local musicians, effectively removing them from their local audiences.

THE STATE AND IK

The government is well aware of what is at stake in the indigenous knowledge arena. In today's global environment, protecting indigenous knowledge is as much a political act as an economic and ethical act. Encouraged by Unesco's efforts to bridge the gaps between mainstream society and smaller, local communities, government appointed a working group to come up with a policy to guide and direct the preservation and appreciation of South Africa's indigenous heritage.

The document, known as African Knowledge Systems (AKS) or Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), was unveiled by the Department of Arts, Science, Culture and Technology's recent Draft Policy Framework in March 2002. Entitled "Vision and goals for an IKS/AKS policy for South Africa", the draft concentrates on positioning IK policy as a proactive response to historical and social injustices and as an effort to protect the property rights of local communities.

The ideal outcome of the policy is to deepen public awareness about the value of IK. It also seeks to establish a "cadre" of information documenters and retrievers, information users and information technology experts to retrieve, curate and facilitate the reappropriation of IK by and for African people.

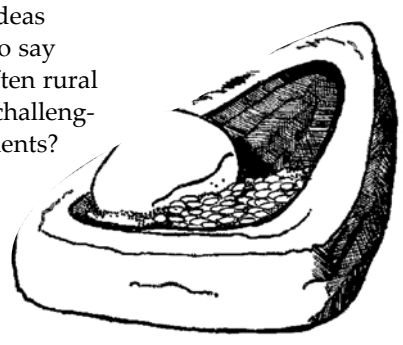


AND THEN THERE'S THE MEDIA

Even though the ideal outcome of the policy is to deepen public awareness of IK, the role of the media within this framework is seen as potentially negative. While it is taken for granted that historically the media has contributed to the erosion, stereotyping and mystification of African cultures, nowhere is it implied that they have a potential part to play in its revitalisation and meaningful integration within mainstream society.

The nub of the question comes down to, "Who are we (the media) to say what it is to be indigenous, what represents the indigenous?"

The constellation of notions and ideas involves such questions as: Who gets to say what about the ways in which local, often rural communities, choose to deal with the challenges of their social and natural environments? Whose voices do we hear? Do we hear the officials, the "experts" and educators, the locals themselves?



Moreover, how do we hear them? The "problem" with media coverage of indigenous knowledge developments is that they do not lend themselves to the news-capsule approach of most broadcasting and print media.

"Events", such as the building of the grain pit in the opening story, while lending themselves to the news formula, serve instead to entrench, rather than challenge, our view of local knowledge and practices as quaint or marvellous; they reinforce the insidious temptation to congratulate ourselves as "understanding" and somehow thereby contributing to the "survival"

of endangered ways of life. Most journalists deny that they, in any way, contribute to the propagation of stereotypes. They rightly desire being seen as just and fair and objective, and we would be churlish to doubt personal ideals and professional standards. A brief survey conducted by way of telephone interviews with journalists, editors and broadcast producers around the country, showed that respondents were adamant that they were guided by their own sensitivity and balanced judgement when investigating stories involving traditional culture, way of life or thought.

In the newsroom, however, they say it is a different story; how to compress what they know into three or four hundred words, and to sell the article to editors, and moreover, advertisers. As for the impact of media routines, some said they did not have an impact on the final report, while others mentioned routine as having a negative influence on quality. "Traditional knowledge has been overlooked in the past," said Sam Ngwenya, a reporter from the *Daily Dispatch*. "But there is a big market for it. People are hungry to hear about how things are changing."

Many African journalists who responded felt they had a special role to play in bringing out the "truth" from geographical and social areas that they understood by virtue of their own language and cultural background, but at the same time felt constrained by editorial policies and the marketability of the work they produce.

Respondents who work with stories arising from "traditional" culture or rural lifestyles felt that they had to be aware of public interest when they wrote their stories, and mentioned the need to come up with "relevant" and stimulating articles.

"At the moment stories about circumcision are very important," said Ngwenya. " I came from that tradition, from that kind of community. I have a particular interest in how the situation is resolved."

He added: "But at the same time I have to make sure that it fits in with the paper's needs – when I do an article on circumcision, I know that it makes it easier for us to say to blanket manufacturers, "Come on, buy some advertising space here, it's good publicity'."

Staff trainers emphasised the need to get novice journalists to see through their backgrounds so they will be to able to comment adequately on life in local cultures. A few editors said it is necessary to be aware of the demands that language and cultural understanding place on journalists, and the desirability of an empathetic understanding of the cultural context in which the story is embedded.

In-house training on race sensitivity is considered sufficient to overcome personal bias in reporting. However, some trainers felt that more needs to be done to help trainee journalists define newsworthiness of local culture. "I would treat a story about local cultural practices no differently than I would any other kind of story," said a journalist from an Eastern Cape newspaper. "The stories I do always get good space. I try to be culturally sensitive and I separate reports from my comments and opinions. But this is just what a good journalist should do – it should be a universal quality."

If we can take these statements at face value, it would seem then that the reporting on indigenous knowledge would receive as fair and comprehensive coverage as any other "typical" story about local development and community projects. But there are subtleties involved here that go beyond the gross distortions of racist or stereotypical reporting.

O'Donoghue explains: "The media cannot help but misrepresent indigenous knowledge. In a desire to give both sides of the story, they interview local people who will give their version of what they think, what they are doing. But all social beings have habits of mind in which the everyday and the taken-for-granted exist. Such schema unconsciously edit what is said, creating stumbling blocks for the listener who does not understand the deeper cultural meanings behind the words."

To avoid misunderstanding, local people are forced by media conventions to "explain" themselves; as bell hooks would say, the previously marginalised person is forced to come to the centre, to talk the coloniser's talk and show how this way of doing and thinking has a legitimate part to play in modern life, demanding the same respect and carrying an equal weight of meaning as any other choice of lifestyle.

For those people who choose to live in ways informed and mobilised by meanings other than purely materialistic western values, life becomes a continuous struggle to ward off attempts to reify and classify their cultural choices as somehow "other".

In the same way that government policy makes IK into a thing that can be protected, curated and legislated about, media style and audience expectations conspire to shape elements of IK into something that can be re-discovered, resurrected, rescued.

Yet O'Donoghue steers clear of labelling this process as a shameful and ironic attempt to breathe life once again into institutions that were knowingly and callously destroyed by whites and subsequently abandoned by blacks. Indigenous knowledge is not just something out there waiting to be retrieved and acted upon. It is impossible to recapture indigenous knowledge in its pristine form; rather, acknowledging that it is impossible to "put it back and make it whole", educationalists and community development researchers are using the process of re-discovering lost fragments of old wisdom and their affirming power, to inform and sustain collaborative community efforts to find balance and direction within a world seen to be increasingly at risk.

So, thinking back to that fictitious newspaper story that opened this discussion, where can the media find the answer to the double bind of voice and representation? Does it lie in making available public money to establish an effective and truly representative journalism that comes from the communities themselves?

Are the community radio stations and provisions for diversity in print and broadcasting enough? Do communities need to train representatives to speak for them through the media? Or, do media need to train journalists to be more expert in seeing and understanding the complexities of investigating and reporting on issues of indigenous knowledge?

And, how do we get to the point where IK advocates can reasonably expect members of all communities to believe that the benefits of making full use of the whole of the evolving cultural capital available to us will allow us to make better informed, and more realistic, choices in an increasingly challenging and changing world.

Illustrations by Di Martin of KZN Wildlife for the indigenous knowledge series, a project of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, published by Share-Net.

> "The media cannot help but misrepresent indigenous knowledge... they interview local people... but they do not understand the deeper cultural meanings behind the words."

Reporting indigenous knowledge

A leap of

Fern Greenbank spent five years in Alaska, as editor of The Artic Sounder and director of special journalism projects for the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

faith

It doesn't matter where you live in America, some time or another you've probably read, or glanced, at a story about the Gwich'in Indians in Alaska. The stories usually relate to oil development in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and not to the people themselves.

Time and again, we read the mantra: "We know who we are," as the Gwich'in reply to reporters' questions year after year. But, time and again, I think, reporters miss the mark. They don't report who the people are.

We read and hear about the "national" controversy over ANWR, the Porcupine Caribou Herd that calls ANWR home, Indians versus Eskimo, environmentalism versus capitalism, and the Outsiders versus Insiders dilemmas. We really don't know the tiny tribe that has managed to ward off lobbyists, politicians, consultants and their oil-wealthy Northern Eskimo neighbors. They do this with a dogged sense of self and land, and by using the media so expertly you'd think it were a traditional Gwich'in tool.

Reporting environmental issues often involves reporting Native issues, aboriginal rights, uncomfortable historical oppression, culture and alternative forms of place, self and spirituality. It's one thing to research new drilling technologies and another thing to research "alternative" ways of knowing, seeing, believing and living. It's another thing entirely to "believe" or "understand" these things enough to convey them to an audience. One is relatively easy. The others next to impossible. The former is deemed necessary, the latter optional. But is it?

The Gwich'in know who they are. But do we, the readers, the audience, the reporters, the citizens? They tell us time and again who they are – the Caribou People. They tell us time and again why they believe oil production in their backyard will be destructive. But media reports often reflect doubt and suspicion. The assumption is: one Native is the same as another. They're not.

Multiple 'truths'

In Jerry Mander's classic, yet controversial, book *In the Absence of the Sacred: the Failure of Technology and the Survival of Indian Nations*, "reasons" are offered for the lack of media coverage related to indigenous peoples and their view of the environment.

Media managers, and journalists, have little personal contact with Indians; indigenous peoples tend to live where the media don't, in rural and isolated areas. American education does not routinely integrate Native history into the curricula. The media are not usually present to see what transpires when corporations or government try to control land and minerals.

When journalists do arrive to cover Native news, they have little knowledge of the culture and language.

The "Indian message…is far too subtle, sensory, complex, spiritual and ephemeral to fit the gross guidelines of mass-media reporting, which emphasises conflict and easily grasped imagery. It takes a great deal of time for reporters to adequately understand the Native point of view. And finally, "even if the reporter does understand, to successfully translate that understanding through the medium, and through the editors and the commercial sponsors – all of whom are looking for action – is nearly impossible".

As a university student, Mander's book was required reading in a course on Native American literature, and not just for journalism students. We were forced to look critically at the way we viewed the world versus the way others viewed the world. As a journalist in training, it made sense to understand the time and effort necessary to present issues from within a framework of knowledge, not from a distance. So, off I went to the Arctic to gain a better understanding of the Native point of view.

'Mitigating' factors

It didn't take long to realise it was easier said than done. You can live among Native peoples for decades and still not truly be able to speak "for them". The greatest lesson I learned in the Arctic, besides how to stand upright in a blizzard without suffering a broken nose, was that journalists MUST consider indigenous points of view as valid, not just as a journalistic exercise. Whenever humanly possible, journalists MUST ask people to speak for themselves, then write what they say.

I served as editor of *The Arctic Sounder*, a community newspaper located in the Inupiaq Eskimo village of Kotzebue on the shores of the Chukchi Sea. The Kotzebue office was one half of a two-bureau newspaper. The other was located in Barrow, the northernmost point in America, a village already touched by the riches of oil production in Prudhoe Bay, a village also culturally dependent on its ability to subsist on whaling. Between the two offices, we served more than 20 Native villages.

Kotzebue is a village of approximately 3,500, located 30 miles above the Arctic Circle. The Northwest Arctic Borough borders the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but sits poised to benefit if oil pours across those borders. My tenure as editor of *The Arctic Sounder* in 1995 was a time of great anxiety over ANWR, which is often called the American Serengeti or The Last True Wilderness. Then President Bill Clinton vowed to veto any bill that would open ANWR to oil development, but he was subjected to incredible pressure. No one in the Far North knew from one minute to the next if Clinton would hold his ground.

There were other newspapers covering the debate, but my bureau partner and I were closest to the action. The reading audience of *The Arctic Sounder* had the most to lose and the most to gain from the outcome. We were often amused, sometimes troubled, by the description of the Gwich'in and Inupiat in Outside papers. But, we also understood. Distance is just that—distance – geographically and emotionally. The media debate inside Alaska's borders was emotional and personal. Outside, it was only about money and power. I was facing directly into the world Mander had described.

The Inupiaq Eskimo of the North Slope Region were waging an all out public relations campaign, paid for with millions from their own oil production dollars. Their Prudhoe Bay oilfield accounts for more than 70% of the state's income, and the North Slope Borough is the richest in the country. The Inupiaq are proud whalers, and the health and welfare of Beaufort Sea whales is key to their survival. They protected their whales. The Gwich'in wanted to protect their Caribou.

The Inupiaq neighbors of the Northwest Arctic, the region with the highest unemployment in the state, were holding a somewhat shaky middle ground, out of fear, it seemed. If they did not support opening ANWR to development, they would lose job opportunities and service contracts. On the other hand, the people seemed to abhor the idea of taking sides; it is not the Native way. Natives in the Northwest had already experienced the environmental degradation of development in an Arctic environment with the expansion of the Red Dog zinc mine, but they were also benefiting from the jobs. To have to choose between a job and desecrating the earth is not easy for people who are inherently close to the land.

The Gwich'in Athabascan Indians remained steadfast in their assertion that the Porcupine Caribou Herd's sacred calving ground near the village of Kaktovik (known as the 10-0-2 area) would be disrupted and the future of the caribou jeopardized. No amount of environmental protection promises would sway the Gwich'in, not in 1995 and not now. "We are the Caribou People," they said. And the caribou are not to be disturbed.

Despite the amount of money poured into the PR campaign by the wealthy Inupiaq, the Gwich'in organised themselves and countered those millions of dollars with unlimited determination. They chose their audience wisely, then chose their media wisely, then chose their message wisely. Every media dollar had a purpose. It was like watching expert marksmen hitting the bullseye shot after shot. They seemed to know exactly where the next Inupiat or government message would be placed, then they beat them to the punch with their own

media message. Billboards, brochures, web sites, feature stories, press conferences, sound bites and powerful quotes, all strategically placed for maximum results.

The debate is still the same, after all these years, and the Gwich'in show no sign of losing their media touch, but a new administration under President George W. Bush seems determined to push through legislation that will result in oil extraction from pristine lands.

Even in 1995, my colleague and I knew we were in the middle of an issue larger than our coverage area, outside our realm of authentic understanding. We were right there in the heart of a region being discussed from Washington, D.C. to Greenland. We were closer to ANWR than we wanted to be at times. We watched and read the national coverage closely. We watched and read and marveled at the skill with which these traditional groups used the media to hang on to tradition.

My colleague and I ran one-person offices covering more than 100 000 square miles each, in the Arctic, with no roads and limited resources. Over a crucial six-month period, we split the issue into mini-topics and tried to provide information, always feeling, sometimes knowing, we weren't doing an adequate job. Deadlines, blizzards and darkness set in. The environment tended to freeze our energy. But, if you listen, trust, and capture moments, then bits of truth sift through misunderstanding.

The truth is hard to tell in a place like Alaska. It's hard anywhere, but more so in Alaska it seems. There is a lot of muffled talk among like-minded groups, but little honest public dialogue among groups with divergent views. Many writers have been there, written about the land and the people, then left. That's a different form of truth, one that is urged along by the safety of distance. Few writers and photographers, if any, tell the truth and stay there. Those that do stay and brave the cold and complexities, provide insight and clarity which helps shrink the divide between them and us.

To be honest, I think Alaskan journalists do a remarkable job covering the debate, but it's the rural-based journalists in particular, those writing for village papers and public radio that offers the most accurate picture. They live in villages. They start to understand, if not feel, the truth. Unfortunately, when those stories are picked up by Outside organisations as 'background', they're stripped of the local language providing the Native view.

With so few Native journalists, in a state where communities are isolated non-Native journalists writing for the state's chain of rural newspapers can't write and run. It forces you to think twice about every question asked, every word written.

I spent enough time in Native villages, among Natives and non-Natives, to hear 'the truth', but I didn't always write it and I noticed few others did either. You have to choose your battles wisely, and sometimes the 'whole' truth loses out. I knew the truth from a Western fact-based perspective, but I had to report the truth of those I served. It was hard work. It wreaked havoc on my conscience.

To write "about" Natives is frowned upon in Alaska. The requirement is to write with Natives. To teach Natives to write about themselves is considered patronising by some, dangerous by others and offensive at times to a culture that doesn't believe in drawing attention to itself. But, to live in Native communities, to try and understand the history of a people, their spirit, their knowledge of the land and to learn from it, is worth the effort some media organisations make.

The chain of rural Alaskan newspapers (Alaska Newspapers, Inc.) happens to be owned by a Native corporation. The chain rarely makes a profit and editor turnover is extremely high.

But, I admire the Calista Corporation for hanging tough and hanging on to the only source of information produced within village boundaries. Some say the corporation clings to the papers because it gives them control over information, which means power, but the amount of power those small papers give the corporation is worth the benefit to the rural residents of Alaska. And, at the end of the day, the amount of work it takes to run a chain of papers in far flung and mostly frozen villages is out of proportion to any power they might gain. I believe they hang on because passionate journalists past and present have convinced Native leaders that owning a piece of media insures Natives have a voice.

> "The Gwich'in know who they are. They are the Caribou People."

The effort and time it takes for journalists to come to "know" others' beliefs is tremendous. Few want to take a leap of faith and just believe. It's even harder to develop a tenuous level of trust, then play a necessary devil's advocate role, with people who have good reason for mistrusting any non-Native, and non-Native journalists in particular.

BEING THERE

When the Gwich'in speak of "needing" the caribou to survive, they aren't talking about food necessarily; they are speaking of their souls. This is interpreted by many non-Natives as more "beads and feathers." Again, so many of us don't believe what we do not feel or understand.

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Alaska's Interior daily, allowed me to serve a reporting internship in the Fall of 1994, which became the beginning of an understanding process that continues to this day. I geared up to write an in-depth piece on the lives of itinerant public health nurses. One of the nurse's routes included the Gwichin Indian Country village of Venetie – the base for the ANWR struggle.

In Venetie, the people were gracious and warm. The language of Gwich'in was spoken all around me. I didn't have a clue at that time of the controversy engulfing the village. By the time I came to 'know' the history and the struggle, I was free of fear and misperceptions so many carry about the Gwich'in.

The Elder women were like my grandmother, beading an alter cloth for the church. The children's skin was a different colour, but they smiled, laughed, cried and played like all children. The poverty, alcoholism, unemployment and cultural disruption were significant to me, not because the people affected were 'poor Natives,' but because people were affected.

We don't have to be naïve, soft or thin-skinned as they say in the media industry, but truth is so much more accessible when we care. It removes that outer layer we build around ourselves. We are taught the opposite in journalism school.

The problem is more than apathy, here and elsewhere; it is a national disinterest in caring about the consequences of our thoughts, as well as our actions. If we incorporate compassion, worldviews and indigenous knowledge into our journalism curricula, we won't produce wimpy reporters; we'll produce better reporters. Judging without knowing is not journalism.

It doesn't matter whether you're an environmentalist or pro-development, Native or non-Native, conservative or liberal – the lessons learned from the Gwich'in strategies are priceless: identity is not just a word, it's a virtue; old and new can mesh, tribe above self, and, the media can serve the people. All the people.

The Gwich'in have been forced to justify their values and lives for the purpose of saving their culture, their borders, their self determination and their caribou. There are no equivalent Gwich'in terms, but they've learned to speak press lingo because it's a survival tool. But within the confines of their village, I never heard them justify their lives. They just lived them.

Journalists need to insist on the time and resources it takes to present and share Native knowledge without justifying it, thereby making it part of this world, not a separate world. Editors, publishers, producers and directors should recognise there is economic gain from 'doing the right thing.' It just takes time to see the gains.

Swedish television news

Driven by the invisible hand

This essay is based on a PhD thesis in which Camilla Hermansson assesses how Swedish television journalism portrayed environmental, consumption and lifestyle issues from 1987 to 1998. Hermansson argues that TV contributed to an ideological shift in Swedish society. Previously the reporting focused on crisis and disaster and government's efforts to manage these through legislation, but recently the journalism has bought into market ideology and portrays environmental issues through the discourses of individual consumer choices and confidence in technology.

Environmental reporting, like all reporting, is strongly influenced by the cultural values considered relevant by society at a given point in time. The manner in which environmental issues are mediated changes over time in context with a society's perspective on its own development and purpose. These fluid and mediated cultural conceptions of society's appropriate manifestation do not fluctuate limitlessly however, but are significantly constrained by such factors as the market and the format which the medium allows. Thus, one can say that news reporting has a "system maintenance" function and that mediated discourse is designed not to exert critique on the existing system, despite the fact that journalists often regard themselves as defending the interests of the weak in conflicts.

Rather, journalism can be regarded as a means for perpetuating the overarching structure of society, or, the popular vision of the contemporary society's functional conditions. Television journalism has a specific authoritative character. It conveys a symbolic type of power which is evident in the manner in which information and messages are communicated in a journalistic context and via one specific medium. While it is expected to act as a critical observer and commentator on state power and reflect on that which transpires within the society, it is at the same time preoccupied with ensuring popularity and marketability. Journalists must design the news in such a manner that it is contextually meaningful, regardless if they are employed by a public service or commercial station.

Economy and environment

One trend seen in the environmental reporting in Swedish television news is that the environmental question is understood in economical terms. The solution to environmental problems lies in principles of a free market economy and at the same time environmental concerns are also seen as something that can generate economic gains.

One of my findings is that the ideological metaphor 'market', works as a positive frame for interpretation of environmental problems and their solutions. The 'market' has enabled journalism to depart from catastrophe reporting and engage themselves in presentation of more pleasant solutions. The opportunity for journalists to reveal environmentally-friendly discoveries and to report on recycling and consumption habits which the 'normal' citizen engages in is evident in this context. The headlines for such stories are not 'disaster' or 'crisis', but rather technological or social innovation, emphasis on locality and everyday activities and taking care of the environment.

Reflection without criticism

Notwithstanding this development, there are subtle differences in how this information is conveyed, something which demonstrates the relationship the journalist has to environmental problems and the formal poltical context. A common thread in environmental politics regards journalism as politically constrained, merely reflecting issues as they are presented without critically analysing the issues at hand. Environmental reporting often originates outside the centres of power of established politics. With respect to international conferences on environmental themes, the focus is typically on visiting dignitaries and their perspectives, and domestically, on the Minister of the Environment, unless the Prime Minister happens to make a statement pertaining directly to the environment.

Journalism has had a tendency to build its stories on preconceptions of how political power is centred with respect to a particular issue, and thereby contributes to the preconception that it is actually these people who are dealing with the issue in question.

Due to the limited time for reflection and contemplation of issues in television journalism, the ideological profiles of different actors in conjunction with their programme for ecological modernisation is often simply not portrayed. Journalists thus convey, in a largely non-reflective fashion, a liberal and pro-market perspective during periods of conservative rule and perspectives with more emphasis on state involvement during periods of social democratic rule.

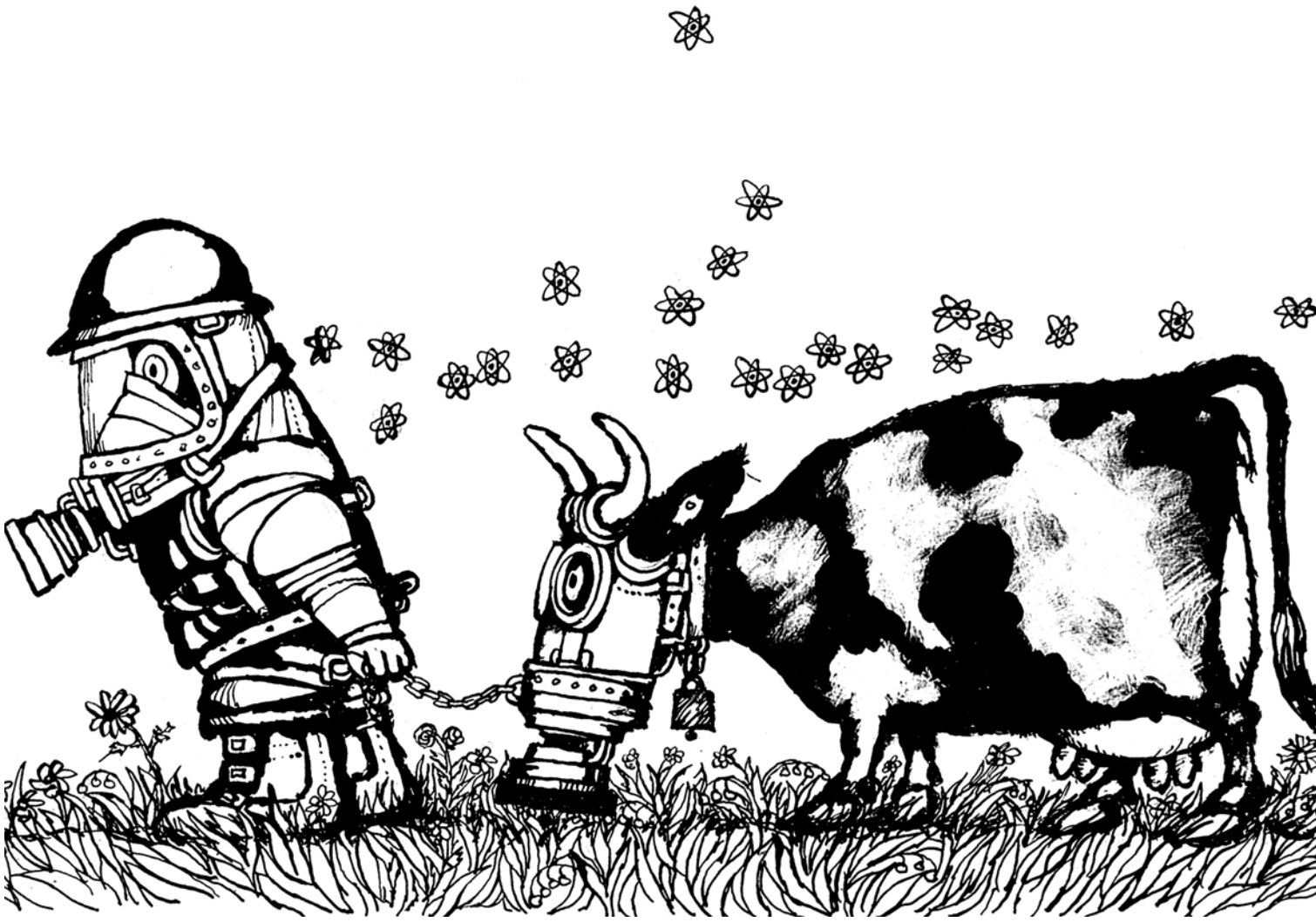
Other market-oriented themes stemming from a generalised subscription to the guiding principles of the "invisible hand" are conveyed to a greater degree than environmental politics, which is comparatively formalised in its coverage, and typically presented in a political context. Consumers, guided by environmental convictions, are to spur on producers in their manufacture and sale of environmentally-friendly wares and services, and such reports convey a message that the solution to environmental problems is found in the relation between the producer and the consumer.

When for example, recycling behaviour is depicted in the television media with realistic scenarios, the consumption-oriented environmental discourse is also embodied and made real in different activities that show contributions to the environment, in a manner corresponding to visions of the ideal society depicted in the television news.

Individualisation and economy

Following the social theorist Ulrich Beck a tendency towards individualisation can be seen in industrial societies in the late 20th century. The individual is no longer tied to binding structures based on social stratification, estates or class as in rural societies. Because of this individuals start to create self biographies and show their personalities through symbols. In late modern society where surface takes precedence over content, it has become important for individuals to position themself with the help of symbols on a fragmented social arena.

One of my findings is that environmental television news not only shows individuals, but also commodities, and the news reporting guides the individual to make environmentally friendly choices at the supermarket. Television



After Chernobyl by EWK

journalism is here the co-creator of framing environmental issues as connected to people's choices to consume. Commodities and consumption are not problematised.

One specific individual that is accentuated is the entrepreneur, ie: the small businessman who innovates new environmentally-friendly uses of old technology, for example by recycling used car parts. Another role model depicted is the 'dedicated person', a committed individual who feels a responsibility for coming generations, often has inherited ecological knowledge and is prepared to work for the environment without economic gain. These 'dedicated persons' are eldery retired persons, the ones who have time to recycle and are not used to fast food. The committed individual is depicted as a prerequisite for environmental work.

Organisations that are depicted – in the consumption-oriented environmental discourse – are the ones that have harmonised their profile towards informing consumers and using environmental labelling, for example The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SNF). The more action-based environmental organisation Greenpeace is not shown to a great extent, because activism is not seen as a useful way of making one's voice heard when it comes to questions of consumption. One gains nothing by civil obedience, the solution to the environmental problem is depicted as increased sales of environmental-labelled durables and through technological improvements.

Television news reports depict consumption-oriented environmental discourse, where the human relationship with nature is illustrated in economic diagrammes and increased sales of different merchandise that are labelled as environmentally-friendly, portraying a 'cleaner' nature. The development of new technology is linked to human interest in saving the environment. Technical innovations and increased sales of, for example, environmentally-friendly batteries, cars with catalytic converters and toilets that separate urine and faeces are held up as examples of environmental engagement, but the total increase in consumption is something which is not depicted. The economic gains of environmentally-friendly products are relativised yet one gets no feeling for the percentage of that which is relativised.

PRESERVING THE WELFARE STATE

Pictures of the nature people want to protect are shown in television news, and it is not a utopia or a return to a Garden of Eden. Rather, the nature that Swedish people have become accustomed to since World War 2 is depicted. The vision we aspire to is conveyed through pictures of open landscapes and rural environments – the nature of summer vacations. This is the nature of the acclaimed Swedish economic and social welfare state.

A radical shift can be said to have taken place whereby environmental issues previously seen as problematic are now seen as solutions to many of the challenges that society faces. But at the same time this shift is based on a view of nature that is almost nostalgic, like a traditional pastoral idyll, an idyll that can be said to have been left behind us during the societal transformation from first a rural society, to an industrial society and towards an information/knowledge-based society.

This vision is a containment of the Swedish welfare system and a promotion of the Swedish middle-class ideal. The Swedish middle-class is staged; ie: the persons who have the money to go on vacation to the Swedish countryside are depicted, not the urban poor.

In a time of globalised economic markets and environmental problems that know no territorial bounds, the depiction of the green 'People's Home' is not about showing a vision of a coming "global village", but a conservative containment of what is regarded as 'typically Swedish'. The notion of the green 'People's Home' rests as much on visions of the genuine Swedish characteristics, as what is supposed to make Sweden unique from an international perspective. In television news reports pictures are shown of Swedish nature enthusiasts, people taking a swim in the archipelago during their holidays and people paddling canoes, as well as forest scenes that people recognise from their Sunday outings.

'Naturalness' is also depicted in the sales promotion of environmentally-friendly goods, such as green electricity. Merchandise that we have among us becomes vivid and is equipped with inherently natural qualities. In the depiction, the goods speak to us; they bear promises and offer moral restoration. If we buy a certain consumer durable, we have thus taken responsibility for the environment and done our part.

SWEDISH CONSUMPTION AND 'THE OTHERS'

At the same time the 'others' are shown, the ones who are a threat to the green 'People's Home' and to the environment. TV reports have covered the threat towards the western lifestyle and the environment that would appear, should for example, the Chinese increase their levels of consumption; increased levels of consumption in the richer parts of the world have however, frequently not been problematised.

News reports have a national and ethnocentric focus and the supposed changes in lifestyle are not related to the so-called 'third' or 'industrialising' world. Changes in lifestyle are connected to the use of new technologies and consumption of environmentally-friendly goods. The total level of consumption is not problematised and, correspondingly, new techologies make it possible to maintain and justify a lifestyle based on an increased level of consumption. The concept of lifestyle disappears from the consumption-oriented environmental discourse and is replaced with an optimism regarding progress and the maintainance of pro-market and economic functions, rather than a problematisation of the relationship between poorer and richer countries. The 'others' and the potential for their increased consumption becomes a threat to the environment, while economic growth in Sweden and environmentally-friendly consumption becomes an idealised vision.

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Making the environment news

Reporting industrial

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BY CLIVE BARNETT & NJORD V SVENDSEN

The current round of corporatisation and commercialisation of media organisations has put severe pressures on serious, critical and independent news journalism around the world. Coverage of complex issues has, in many contexts, declined due to increased pressures for cost efficiency. Environmental issues pose a severe challenge to established routines of news making, because they tend to involve long-term time frames, multi-faceted causal relations, and are characteristically associated with discourses of scientific expertise.

Our research on the news reporting of industrial pollution in the South Durban basin illustrates that serious journalism on environmental issues is certainly possible. Pollution has been a pressing concern for local communities in South Durban for decades. From the 1950s the area has been the site of simultaneous industrial development and forced relocation of African, Indian, and Coloured communities under the Group Areas Act. The residential areas of South Durban suffer very high levels of air, ground, and water pollution, not least because of their contiguity to two oil refineries and myriad petro-chemical industries. But sustained news coverage only really began in the early 1990s. This is all the more notable given a more general international trend for environmental news to decline in the 1990s. Of course, this upswing coincides with the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy in South Africa. But macro-level political change does not in itself explain this particular development. Our research indicates that the key to effective coverage of environmental issues is the quality of relationships between journalists and activists and NGOs.

Browning the environment

In South Africa since 1994, institutional changes and economic restructuring of the news media have significantly transformed journalists' source strategies. In particular, the value to journalists of social movement activists as sources has been enhanced. At the same time, new political opportunities mean that the need for media coverage among movements has been heightened. One of the most important contributions of new environmental NGOs in South Africa during the 1990s was to redefine the environment from a 'green' issue to a 'brown' issue. This involved a move away from a predominant 'green' conservationism to a people-oriented focus on the relationships between pollution and poverty. One of the main strategies for effecting this redefinition has been the deployment by activists of the vocabulary of environmental rights and justice enshrined in the new South African Constitution.

Framing pollution

During the 1990s, the number of stories about industrial pollution in general, and air pollution in particular, in Durban's mainstream commercial newspapers (such as *The Mercury*, *Daily News*, and *Sunday Tribune*) increased almost exponentially. In the late 80s, there were fewer than 10 stories on air pollution in a five-year period. Throughout the 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the number of stories, with nearly 60 stories on air pollution alone in 2000. The high point of South Durban environmental activism in terms of media coverage came in September 2000, with a week-long series of investigative news stories in Durban's leading daily paper, *The Mercury*. The "Poison in Our Air" series written by Tony Carnie and based on extensive investigative work, provided unprecedented coverage of local community concerns in mainstream media. Coverage in *The Mercury* was projected nation-wide and attracted follow-up stories in national broadcast media. The stories used a human-interest narrative that focused upon the unusually high incidence of cancer-related deaths in the South Durban area, particularly among children. This focus on children's health provides a universalising frame that enabled the plight of a specific set of poor black communities to be articulated with the concerns of a readership that is still predominantly white. This series also illustrates the fundamental shift in the pattern of sources represented in environmental news. Prior to 1995, official government and business voices dominate as cited sources in all coverage. But from 1995, the voices of individual residents, local community organisations, and NGOs emerge as equally legitimate sources.

The adoption of a storytelling narrative, focusing on individual life histories and hazards, is a means of reconciling the long-time frames of environmental change with the daily-ness of definitions of news. News coverage increasingly gives space and credence to a counter-discourse of local experience that contrasts with the 'objective', technical-bureaucratic discourse of business and government.

The enhanced legitimacy of local communities as sources is underlined by the emergence, epitomised by the "Poison in the Air" series, of a much more interpretative style of news reporting that compliments the adoption of storytelling forms of narrative. Environmental journalism in the early 1990s tended to be framed by a neutral, de-personalised narrative style, in which objectivity is established by the elision of the reporter's authorial voice. Since the mid-1990s, the presence of the reporter's voice in stories becomes much more common, explicitly interpreting issues and events. The interpretative presence of the reporter's voice is an important means of mediating between the specific concerns and experiences of South Durban residents and a more general readership, much of which has little direct experience of living conditions in this part of the city.

By giving space to an alternative construction of pollution in the area, the articulation of ordinary experience with journalistic interpretation contextualises the discourse of science and expertise as just one perspective in a fundamentally contested public debate. *The Mercury's* reporting of South Durban is the outcome of the changing organisational dynamics of the Independent news group of which it is a part. These include the parent group's commitment to a business-led agenda of economic development; the commercial imperative to reposition newspapers in an effort to engage broader readerships and retain revenue; shifts in the norms of reporting towards human-interest stories; and a gradual transformation in the general ethos of journalism.

The activists

The increase in news coverage of industrial pollution issues has been primarily enabled by the emergence of a single organisational 'voice', the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in 1997, able to credibly represent the concerns of diverse communities in the area. Journalists involved in covering South Durban broadly divided into two camps in their attitude to community organisations and NGOs as sources. Those who have only occasionally covered the issue have tended to be somewhat sceptical of activist groups. On the other hand, journalists with the environment as their speciality beat have come to see local activists and community organisations as highly useful and credible sources. They are also much more inclined to accept advocacy journalism as a legitimate vocation.

The credibility of environmental activists and organisations as sources is an achievement of a varied communications and lobbying strategy undertaken by SDCEA, and associated NGOs such as groundWork and the Environmental Justice Network Forum. A key objective of these groups has been to establish legitimacy and credibility amongst journalists, in order to attract mainstream media attention, and thereby establish their public legitimacy in the eyes of government and business. As well as tried and trusted techniques such as holding public meetings in local communities to

pollution in Durban

mobilise support, SDCEA has also adopted highly innovative campaigning strategies.

For example, they have developed the "Toxic Tour". This is an excursion of the South Durban basin that takes in a series of key sites and sights of pollution, uncontrolled industrial development, hazardous chemical storage, habitat destruction, and much else. The Toxic Tour is a low cost but highly effective way of staging the problem of industrial pollution for local journalists, visiting activists, and academics, as part of a strategy of developing awareness and publicising the problems faced by local communities. The media-savvy of local environmental activists is also illustrated by the launching of a "Bucket Brigade" campaign in 2000, an idea borrowed from US environmental justice movements.

This is a simple strategy for empowering local people by providing them with a basic capacity to monitor industrial pollution. The launch of the Bucket Brigade in South Africa was made into a rolling news story, organised as a national event starting in Durban but moving on to pollution blackspots in other provinces. The aim was to publicise the inadequacy of both government and corporate monitoring of industrial pollution. The campaign attracted news coverage in both the print media and on national radio and television.

Learning from South Durban

The main objective of South Durban environmental activists has been to mobilise mainstream media attention as a means of acting upon national government ministries and major multi-national corporations. In this respect at least, they have actually been highly successful. The amount of coverage has certainly increased, and local residents and environmental organisations like SDCEA and groundWork have gained credibility and prominence as sources. In turn, journalists have begun to apply a broader repertoire of styles and approaches to their work, indicating an attempt to address a wider audience about the significance of environmental rights. In news coverage since 2000, it has become routine for government and corporate initiatives on environmental issues to be ascribed to the sustained mobilisation by communities and activist organisations. Furthermore, it is clear that media coverage has significantly altered the dimensions of public debate about environmental policy not just in South Durban, but at a national level too. For example, in early 2001 the Independent's national business paper *Business Report* established an environmental news beat, based in Durban. This illustrates the extent to which the potential environmental and social impacts of industrial and urban growth have become issues that business investment decision-making can no longer ignore. The example of South Durban is therefore indicative of the extent to which a culture of public accountability around environmental issues has begun to open up through the articulation of local and national activism with mainstream environmental journalism.

We do not want to idealise this particular example, nor under estimate the continuing pressures facing journalists in South Africa and elsewhere in covering contentious issues. There are four themes that emerge from this case study that we want to underscore in conclusion.

1. Media transformation in South Africa since 1994 has transformed the norms of news making and newsworthiness. New technologies like email have changed the speed, frequency, and range of distribution that political actors can attain in accessing news organisations. Initiatives to promote 'developmental journalism' in training and education have also enhanced the importance of environmental issues.
2. The practical realisation of the democratic potential of news media depends on the ways in which activists, social movements, and NGOs engage with the changed imperatives driving news journalism in post-apartheid South Africa.
3. This leads on to the observation of the importance of locally embedded activist organisations being able to network internationally, in order to access various resources, including technical assistance and discursive framing strategies.
4. A point of caution: one of the key reasons why this story has become a focus of extensive news attention is because of the importance of the South Durban industrial region as a hub of national economic growth. This same degree of national significance does not attach itself quite so easily to all contentious issues. This underscores the point that the democratic role of the news media is not merely a matter of journalistic practice. It depends more broadly upon the capacities of progressive political actors to articulate the scales of everyday life with the scales at which effective political power is exercised, by adopting discourses and strategies that demand the attention of news media organisations.

Tony Carnie, author of the "Poison in our air" series, took this picture of South Durban air pollution.

The wretched of the Niger Delta

Chinedum Uwaegbulam works with Guardian Newspapers Limited, publishers of The Guardian, Nigeria. He is a media consultant for several non-governmental organisations and the executive director of Journalists Network for Environmental Conservation (JOUNET). JOUNET was established in 1999 to promote sound and objective reporting and dissemination of environmental information. The group also champions the participation of indigenous people in environmental management.

BY CHINEDUM UWAEGBULAM

Christiana Akpode, 25, was radiating life, hope and ambition like many other young boys and girls of Jesse Clan, in the Ethiope Local Government Area of Delta State.

On 17 October 1998, however, everything she had held to, including her life, went up in flames. From there, she plodded the streets in Jesse with festering wounds, helpless and uncared for by society.

She became bedridden, with wounds from her mid-section to her legs. From the kneecaps to her feet, the skin tissue was badly damaged and dripped body fluid, which caused a horrible stench.

She was later discharged from Saint Francis Hospital, some 70km from Jesse, without any cure. In September 2000, the girl could not fight on; she died, along with her dreams and aspirations.

Christiana, like about a thousand other Jesse people, were victims of a burst pipeline fire disaster. The incident is a consequence of one of many oil spills in the Niger Delta region that have aroused peoples' feelings, causing unquantifiable losses and ecological devastation, destruction of marine life and socio-economic paralysis.

In a period of four years, from 1976 to 1980, about 800 incidents of oil spillage were reported, and from 1980 to 1999, about 2 000 incidents occurred. From 1990 to 1995 about 700 other cases of spillage were said to have occurred. In all, from 1976 to 1995, there were more than 3 500 incidents resulting in the discharge of more than two million barrels of crude oil onto and into the land, swamps and offshore environment.

Mineral exploitation has left devastating consequences not only in the Niger Delta but other parts of Nigeria, such as Jos, where tin and ore have been mined for years, and the coal mines of Enugu.

"But never have the problems associated with mineral exploitation assumed such proportions with dire consequences as in the Niger Delta," says Prof Akinjide Osuntokun, who teaches at the University of Ibadan, Oyo State.

Typical of the Nigerian government, no incident has come and gone in the Niger Delta without a lot of buck-passing. The communities and vandals are always the culprits, while the oil firms whose rusty pipes may have caused the spill are spared, which places government in a better position to avoid making compensation.

The Niger Delta region, located in Southern Nigeria, covers nine states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Imo and Rivers. The region is one of the largest wetlands in the world. It encompasses over 70 000km2. The mangrove forest occupies 6 000km2, the most extensive in West and Central Africa.

The Niger Delta has the high biodiversity characteristic of extensive swamp and forest areas, with many species of plants and animals. It is also the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, generating about 90% of foreign exchange earnings from petroleum products. Petroleum exploration and prospecting began in the region in 1958 and ever since, has assumed greater dimensions.

Unfortunately, the indigenous of the Niger Delta, whose land and sacrifices have produced the country's wealth, have progressively become more impoverished.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

Pollution has taken its toll on the air, soil and rivers. The inhabitants now constitute a clan of the "Wretched of the Earth".

The tribes of fishermen from riverine areas such as Abonema, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ukwuani and Bonny are disappearing.

The people are counting their losses. As Ibiba Don-Pedro, from the Ijaw speaking area states: "In many homes in the oil producing Niger Delta, younger family members have never savoured the rich tastes of soups and stews made with the giant croakers, barracuda pikes and catfish. The good cooks among Ijaw speaking people know that something vital is lost when they prepare some traditional fish dishes without the particular fish that gives that fish its particular flavour and character."

She lamented further: "In times past, it was a thing of honour to be fisherfolk; cloth, sacks of money hidden in ancient metal boxes, treasures of coral beads, gold jewellery, George wrappers, princely walking sticks, and for the more affluent fisherman, half a dozen canoes tied up at the waterside, and a house or two in the village, were all prizes for a life of struggle. All that is gone. Today, to be described as a fisherman is to be given a tag of wretchedness."

Recently, water hyacinth has been added to the list of the people's woes, colonising streams and rivers and causing navigational problems. The agony of the inhabitants is worsened by land pollution problems that have changed the character of the areas, causing the destruction of crops, farms, vegetation and wildlife.

"It also impairs human health," according to Prof Steve Okecha , of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State. This has greatly affected their agricultural produce.

A study carried out in 1995 revealed that between 1992 and 1993, the total area under major food crop production in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta State decreased by 41.7% and by 15% between 1992 and 1995. It is estimated that of the 2 185 000 hectares that is the land area of Rivers and Bayelsa states, about half, is swampy.

The Niger Delta region was rich in elephants and monkeys, which roamed around the towns in the late 1950s and 60s. These species have long disappeared from the area as a result of oil exploration, gas production and poaching. Also, the gathering of wood for fuel and indiscriminate harvesting of timber has caused deforestation, which has made gully erosion and coastal erosion a common feature.

The flaring of gas in the vast oil fields of the region has seriously impacted on the environment. Nigeria has the worst record of gas flaring in the world.

"The sulphur dioxide produced by the fertilizer companies causes the devastation of forests, this gas also causes respiratory ailments in human beings," says Okecha. Poisonous chemicals abound in the delta area. When 8 000 drums containing about 3 500 tons of deadly chemicals were imported by Guan Fransco Rafelli, an Italian businessman, no one knew the impact until the villager Sunday Nana, who leased his premises in the Port town of Koko for a monthly charge of US $50, died.

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

In 1992, the government set up the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), an intervention agency to pilot development and infrastructure provisions. But it folded. "Misappropriations, misapplication of resources and rampant corruption have led to the subversion of OMPADEC," said Osuntokun.

The betrayal of the people's trust by government and the oil companies has largely

TOP: Erosion is a menace in Niger Delta villages.
ABOVE: Caked oil in the farmland.

contributed to the raging crisis in the Niger Delta. The crisis flared in the 90s when the agitation of Ogoni people for the implementation of their bill of rights was rebuffed. It deepened after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, founder, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and leaders of the Ogoni community.

Other communities, who had kept silent reacted sharply, using youths to destabilise the work of the oil firms.

Today, there is frequent kidnapping of oil workers and other disturbances in the region. Oil workers live in fear and contractors operating in the area have withdrawn their equipment.

The present democratic government, in an attempt to tackle the injustice perpetrated against the region, obtained approval from the National Assembly for the establishment of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Their one-year of operation has raised another controversy.

Billions are being sunk into projects without any impact on the communities, while the oil firms are now backing out from the legal responsibility. They say it was not proper to ask them to pay three percent of their yearly budget into the NDDC account.

This amounts to double taxation, as they pay a two percent education tax. However, NDDC has awarded more than 700 contracts valued at N18 billion.

But, Nigerian pro-environment groups such as the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Environmental Information on Nigeria (ENVIN), Journalists Network for Environmental Conservation (JOUNET), Watch the Niger Delta and others are fighting to restore dignity to the Niger Delta region.

Many of them have canvassed for sustainable use of natural resources for the people. They have, at some points, engaged in open confrontations with the government and its agents.

AND THE PLIGHT OF THE JOURNALISTS

For Nigerian environmental journalists, covering the Niger delta at a time of crisis is like going to war. One needs courage and commitment. If the problem is serious, police or military protection is required to access communities.

The coverage of oil spills is another kettle of fish. Most of the disasters occur in remote areas. A trek of one or two hours is often needed to get to such sites. Where the incident happens in riverine areas, the stakes are higher. A boat ride in the sea for an hour is required.

The main constraint for journalists is poor remuneration, more so with government-owned media organisations. Sometimes journalists work for months without salaries. This has impacted on the ethics of the profession.

There are many private sector influences over the media through lawsuits. Community leaders sometimes connive with polluting firms to conceal information, with a view toward obtaining material compensation.

Again, the government policies adhered to by civil servants, researchers and scientists prohibit them from granting media interviews. Researchers have to speak to journalists on trust and rarely want to be quoted in stories.

But the major constraint is the inability of editors to see environmental stories as good copy. They are usually tucked into page three or four, while business or political stories are given prominence unless the issue at stake is a national disaster.

Sometimes I have been excited about a story because of the news value, only for the news editor, who is not groomed in the environmental field, to puncture such enthusiasm. He would rather have the story run on inside pages or leave it out of the publication completely.

There are few opportunities for environmental journalists. Media houses hardly budget for training, except now that the information technology wave has made it imperative to educate journalists on the rudiments of using the computer and browsing the Internet.

The long years of distortions of the Niger Delta landscape have put the people in the back seat of development. Today, even the plan by government to bring relief to the communities through NDDC is in doubt. Critics say, it is aimed as scoring political points.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) is the only chance for the Niger Delta people, to ensure government and the oil firms respect the norms and embark on sustainable exploitation of their natural resources.

> "The region is one of the largest wetlands in the world. Unfortunately, the indigenous, whose land and sacrifices have produced the country's wealth, have become more improvished."

Finding the bush meat balance in Ghana

Dzifa Azumah has worked for the Daily Graphic and for the Ghanaian Times. She now works at the Ghana News Agency where she has been involved in reporting the plight of rural communities but also working with public education teams to educate these communities on sound environmental practices.

BY DZIFA AZUMAH

Wildlife plays a crucial role in the socio-cultural development of Africa, particularly in Ghana, where it features prominently in festivals, the arts, drama and folklore. Apart from serving as totemic symbols for several clans, wildlife provides animal protein in the diets of many peoples. And, many species of wildlife, ranging from insects to reptiles to mammals, are a delicacy and provide a major source of income for some rural communities.

Nicholas Ankude, executive director of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission, says research shows that the annual volume of bush meat harvested by hunters in Ghana recently was estimated at about 384 000 tons with a value of US$350-million. Total annual consumption is estimated at about 225 300 tons, which is worth about US$205-million, with the remaining either being exported or left to go to waste.

"The figures do not pass through the national accounting system and, therefore, the contribution of wildlife to the national economy may be difficult to appreciate," he said.

Direct earnings from wild animal-based small enterprises such as export of live animals for the pet trade are more tangible. This trade is worth more than $600 000 annually. In 2000, Ghana earned more than five billion cedis from exporting reptiles, mammals, amphibians, scorpions and spiders. The highest revenue earner was the python at 2.7-billion cedis.

Ernest Lamptey, a senior wildlife officer of the Ghana Wildlife Division, says: "The future of the trade for the export of these reptiles, mammals and amphibians lies in the exporters breeding the animals themselves," he stressed.

He said exporters of pythons, for instance, breed more than 80% of the reptiles. They collect pregnant females from the wild and keep them until they lay their eggs. The young pythons are monitored until they are ready for export.

Lamptey says although the department allows the exportation of almost all animals, including chameleons, lizards, wall geckos, black cobras, tortoises, giant rats, scorpions, millipedes and some insects such as the praying mantis: "all animal species have quotas which exporters are not expected to exceed".

Animals are hunted and collected from all over the country in sacks and stored that way till they are exported to Europe and the USA where they were used as pets, delicacies and for research work by universities and other institutions.

Wildlife also plays a small but important role in Ghana's tourism industry, providing great potential for future development of eco-tourism. The Kakum National Park in the Central Region attracts visitors interested in watching wildlife from the canopy walkway. Admittedly, Ghana cannot compete with the wildlife attractions of Eastern and Southern Africa. But it can offer a cocktail of attractions such as beaches, forts and castles and a rich variety of cultural displays and festivals.

Okyeame Ampadu-Agyei, country director of Conservation International-Ghana, says: "Our natural forests and timber industry depend on animals such as bats, birds, elephants and monkeys for pollination, seed dispersal and regeneration. We cannot have a natural forest without these animals."

In fact, most of our economic activities based on renewable natural resources depend to some extent on the complex interactions of wild flora and fauna. Though the economic benefits are often obscured and difficult to quantify, it does not make them any less real.

In addition to economic benefits, wildlife plays an important role in Ghana's culture and traditions. Many of the people recognise particular totemic animals, which feature in folklore and receive particular reverence and protection.

The monkeys around Buabeng and Fiema villages, near Nkoranza in the Brong Ahafo Region, which now attract a large number of visitors, have flourished as a result of such protection.

Ankude says wildlife is economically, ecologically and culturally important. Ghana has 222 different species of mammals and 721 birds, about four times as many as in the United Kingdom, a country of similar size. The country also provides sanctuary to many species listed as internationally threatened with extinction. These include 34 plants, 13 mammals, eight birds and two reptiles as well as some endemic species.

Ghana has a special responsibility as a member of the international community to protect this extraordinary biodiversity. Ghana is signatory to important international conventions, including the Biodiversity Convention, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the World Heritage Convention.

Substantial wildlife resources exist outside protected areas, which are subject to various legislative instruments intended to ensure sustainable use. Ankude says, for example, that hunters are by law required to obtain licences to hunt and may do so during a designated hunting season.

Group hunting is outlawed except for cultural purposes (with permits) and different species are given various degrees of legal protection through their inclusion on the appropriate legislative schedules.

But wildlife is being over-hunted to a point where the dwindling number of animals is threatening the food security of both rural and urban communities. This state of affairs, Ankude says, is mainly due to non-observance of the regulations coupled with inadequate support from the law enforcement agencies.

One of the measures to regulate hunting and ensure sustainable use is the institution of a closed season that begins from August to December every year. This is the period when most wild animals, particularly mammals such as the duiker, bush pig, honey badger, pangolins, porcupines and royal antelope, among others, gestate.

It is, therefore, imperative that these animals are given a respite from hunting to wean their young for a successful recruitment into the next generation.

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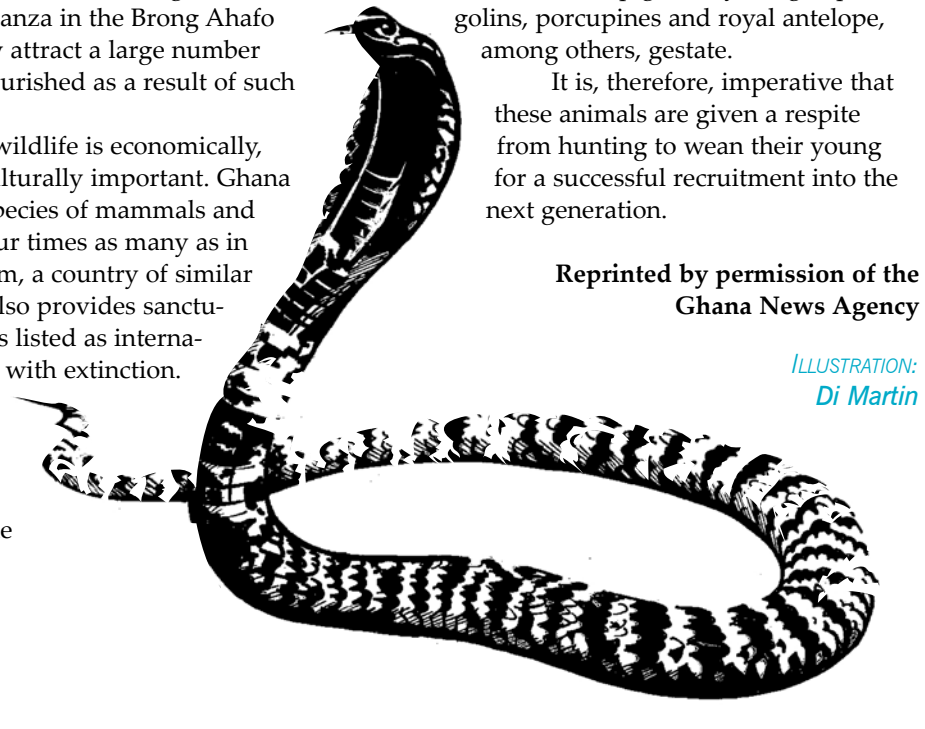

ILLUSTRATION: Di Martin

The tenacity of the Zambian stonecrushers

Bivan Saluseki is a journalist at The Post newspapers in Zambia which is an independent daily.

BY BIVAN SALUSEKI

Although the Zambian environmental legal framework has grown over the years, this has not been matched by improvement in the quality of natural resources and the environment. There are weaknesses in the legislation and in the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation. Even more so in the reporting of environmental activities by the media.

The effects of these inadequacies cry out to be seen. Specifically, in downtown Lusaka, illegal stone crushers with mini-quarries continue to dig and deface the city, even as close as the military airport in the capital city. To them, defacing the landscape is nothing but a way of eking out a living from the soil, especially with the rising pangs of poverty.

An estimated 86% of the more than 10 million Zambians are poor and live on less than US$ 1 a day. This explains why minefelds dot the edges of the capital. Zambians, like Moffat Zulu, can be found blasting a huge stone with a hammer, laws or no laws; he would surely never give up his trade. He does not want to be like the other "lazy bones" that take up prolonged leisure in their uncomfortable beds and those who are resigned to their fate. Zulu surely does not want to be one of them. With improvised tools, sporting the physique of weight lifters from the effects of their energy-sapping occupation, he, like hundreds of others, are the professional stone crushers and, he has a quarry he calls his own.

Over the years stone crushers have withstood the rigours of the stone crushing business and ironically, they claim not to have contracted any respiratory illness arising from the nature and hazards associated with the work they do and the environment in which they work. Some say they have managed to educate their children and pay for medical services in government hospitals which ask for money before treatment.

There are weaknesses within the sector ministries and in the formulation of environmental legislation due to gaps, overlaps, conflicts and inconsistencies. There is inadequate research and legislative review and enforcement mechanisms and procedures. It becomes ping pong when the issue of stone crushing is raised in Zambia. The local city council blames the environmental body and the environmental body shifts the blame back onto the council. Who is supposed to enforce the legislation?

Meanwhile the crushing goes on, and once in a while when council employees dare get on the streets to remove the crushers, it's at great personal risk – they get stoned and then retreat to their offices.

This explains the stone crushers' fierce tenacity. They are oblivious to the law that prohibits illegal stone quarrying, especially in undesignated places. Hundreds of these people have taken advantage of the laxity in the law regarding many forms of environmental degradation.

When the law sleeps

The law is in a slumbering stupor, and it is not clear who should do what to the crushers. They are determined to mint money at whatever cost to the environment. They do not know that the craters formed are a breeding ground for mosquitoes after rainwater is trapped in it. And in Mutendere, one of the poverty stricken townships in Lusaka, the craters are used as toilets. It's an ugly scene. But, certainly the illegal injudicious exploitation of natural resources and activities that are inimical to a well-balanced environment, will certainly go on unabated.

Recently, the Environmental Council of Zambia held a workshop for media personnel, in which I was a participant. It was noted that the stone crushers do their business with a tinge of remorsefulness, but maybe they do so because their livelihood depends on the soils.

In fact, when some of them are reminded about the attendant health risks associated with the craters, and other damages linked to illegal stone quarrying, most of them say they cannot afford to sit back because they cannot eat the law.

Many people toy with the idea that whatever the law may be, no one has the right to stop them from exploiting God-given natural resources.

It is in this context that the need to synchronise environmental laws and co-ordinate their execution was whipped to the fore at the workshop. However, other impediments to enforcement of environmental legislation were brought to light.

Who is supposed to do what?

Who is supposed to enforce what? The Zambian environmental council, though given powers to enforce environmental legislation, is constrained regarding large scale operations because of lack of funding.

How ironic for a country that is trying to diversify from mining to agriculture and tourism. Apart from illegal stone crushing, there are also subtle but effective activities like charcoal burning which continue to endanger most of Zambia's forests. Only recently, Zambia's biggest rivers supplying water to most of the major towns were clogged with the hyacinth weed. The extent of the problem was so serious that stories on the weed even got prominence in the Zambian media.

In Zambia reporting on the environment starts and ends with official statements from government ministers and other officials. A glance at the Zambian media, particularly the print media, and you'll see there is only one government paper that has a column on the environment and unfortunately most people do not read it. There are a lot of reasons for that, but my guess is that it could be the style of writing.

Zambia is endowed with a rich natural resource base and an environment that is relatively unspoiled. However, the government is realising that a threat to sustainable use exists. Based on potential social costs, it has been identified that health effects from the lack of clean water and sanitation facilities, particularly in urban areas, is the most critical environmental problem in the country.

The other major problems are the interrelated soil erosion and soil fertility decline on agricultural lands, deforestation, potential depletion of wildlife and fisheries resources and air pollution problems in the Copperbelt cities. The general economic decline over the past decade has led to high rates of unemployment and lowered output. This puts even more pressure on natural resources as people turn to the exploitation of the natural resources for survival. These problems are compounded by the inadequate policy and legal frameworks that integrate the socio-economic development objectives with environmental management objectives. It is these issues that need to be highlighted. And they will certainly need the help of the media.