

FURTHER & DEEPER

“I think mainstream media is running straight to hell. The light bulbs are on side news and superficial stories because managers get fired if they don't live up to the quota system,” says Charles Lewis, inventor of International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

Lewis, a successful producer at CBS flagship *60 minutes*, left the network when things were going great. *60 minutes* was the cutting edge investigative TV programme setting standards for the industry. But it wasn't enough. Lewis wanted to go further, deeper and beyond everything existing media had to offer.

Starting in his home, Lewis founded the Centre for Public Integrity in 1989. He engaged some of America's finest researchers and journalists. Together they set out on a non-profit crusade to protect the public interest. Raising money for its operations from foundations, members and retainers with news organisations, the CPI soon became a player in the Washington DC power grid.

Hard work and painstakingly thorough investigations of politicians, their decisions and the interests behind them has given CPI the status as the most respected watchdog organisation in the United States.

Contemplating its success, Lewis felt an urgent need to extend the CPI's mission to the rest of the world. Being a longtime member of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), a professional organisation with a steadily growing international membership, Lewis knew there had been few previous organised efforts to carry out cross-border investigative projects.

“In an increasingly frontierless, yet complex world, there is a need for in-depth information that transcends national boundaries,” says one of the centre's pamphlets.

That is why ICIJ was created — to meet that need.

For more see <http://www.icij.org/> and <http://www.publicintegrity.org>



BY MICHEL BAJUK

Investigative journalism goes global

CORRUPTION. Crime. Exploitation. International drug cartels. Global crime syndicates laundering extensive capital through intercontinental transactions. Reporting about global issues is often brief and confusing. Lack of time and money are excuses for neglected investigations and analysis about complicated issues.

The impact of globalisation reaches far beyond the flickering pale green shimmer of the stock market. The obstacles to journalism are internationalised, intensified and concern all of us. Yet leading news organisations continuously slash their foreign coverage. Bureaus are closed, correspondents are called home.

Who cares? Is there anybody out there trying to examine and explain the most important questions of our times?

Yes. A handful.

Some of the best investigative journalists on the planet have gathered at Harvard. Fifty-two reporters and editors from 33 countries constitute the recently established International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). Their immense task: save the world.

The consortium was initiated by a respected American non-profit organisation serving the public: the Centre for Public Integrity (CPI). The Centre is funded by philanthropic foundations and engages some of the country's finest investigative researchers and journalists. Hard work and painstakingly thorough investigations of politicians, their decisions and the interests behind them has given the CPI the status as the most respected watchdog organisation in the United States.

The Harvard environment is classic. It can be recognized from numerous American movies. The autumn sun shines into the elegant old building through the colourful fireworks of the trees.

There is tension in the air. The journalists are skeptical when they begin the discussions behind closed doors. How are they supposed to deal with the task?

These reporters have written and produced hundreds of special reports, books and documentaries. Their reporting has overthrown corrupt governments, imprisoned savage druglords and made horrible mass murderers answer for their crimes. Many reporters have paid a high price. Some have survived assaults, kidnappings and

bombs, and others have suffered false accusations, prison sentences and death threats. Several now live in exile.

“We want to make the world a better place by exposing evil forces working against the interests of humanity,” says Joe Thloloe, one of seven African ICIJ members. Like many of the other reporters he has his doubts about the project. But the three days of deliberations give him hope.

Seeing the great potential, he names several previously neglected African issues with a global impact that he would like to see investigated and prioritised on the consortium's agenda. “The conflict in Congo looks really ugly,” he says, pointing out the most urgent concern he shares with his fellow African members. The increase in organised crime, the high level of corruption and ongoing savage exploitation are other issues the African members would like to investigate.

“We all want to make a difference. The project brings journalists around the world to make common efforts. This is specifically interesting for Africa. We have big problems of major international concern,” says Kabral Blay-Amihere, publisher and editor of *The Independent* in Ghana.

The ICIJ operations will be co-ordinated from the parent organisation in Washington DC. The members will be contracted in ad-hoc teams. High-tech tools and techniques such as sophisticated satellite imagery and savvy experts in computer assisted reporting are at the consortium's disposal. The members' findings will be communicated and shared through encrypted e-mail messages. Their progress will be published on the secure members-only website.

“In Africa we are still meeting our sources in dark alleys. Our telephone lines are often tapped, and the thought of communicating openly about anything sensitive is unthinkable,” says Gwen Lister, editor of *The Namibian*.

How are the journalists supposed to make priorities of the troubles of the world? What is most significant for humanity — to scrutinise the financial crises of Russia and Asia or to examine the smuggling and trade of humans in South East Asia? Is it more vital to track religious and political fanatics or to map dumping of poisonous waste?

The reporters avoid answering the questions for now. Their decisions must be wise. They need to think, but not for too long. Time is ticking.

The credentials are outstanding; the mission is gigantic. Can they handle it? They are serious about it, and at least they are willing to try. We could certainly use a few more of their kind.

Michel Bajuk is executive director of the Swedish investigative reporters association

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THE AFRICAN CPI MEMBERS

● **CATHERINE GICHERU**, Kenya, is chief of the Mombasa bureau of *The Nation* group of newspapers. Stories about the government of President Arap Moi; the involvement of senior government officials in the embezzlement of funds from the national pension fund and the involvement of government officials in the assassination of a local politician.

● **NEWTON KANHEMA**, South Africa/Zimbabwe, is the senior political writer for *The Sunday Independent* in Johannesburg. Exposed the \$1.5 billion arms deal between South Africa and Saudi Arabia that the government-owned arms manufacturer had tried to

keep secret. He also revealed that the ANC had accepted political donations from Malaysian businessmen, intended to help pay off the party's debts, but which were diverted to private funds.

● **GWEN LISTER**, Namibia, is founding editor of *The Namibian*, an independent newspaper started in 1985 during apartheid colonialism in Namibia, a time when the paper's offices were bombed and its journalists harassed and jailed. Among the numerous awards she has been honored with is the 1992 Committee to Protect Journalists International Press Freedom Award.

● **CHARLES ONYANGO-OBBO**, Uganda, is editor of Uganda's leading independent newspa-

per, *The Monitor*, for which he writes a weekly current affairs column, “Ear to the Ground”. He also writes weekly columns for the East African. In 1997 he published a collection of political and social essays in his book “Uganda's Poorly Kept Secrets”. Among all the prizes he has been awarded, he was named Uganda's journalist of the Year in 1992 and 1995.

● **JOE THOLOE**, South Africa, formerly served as the SABC's editor-in-chief of television news. He was the second president of the Union of Black Journalists and was its leader when the South African government shut it down in 1977 while Thloloe was in jail. Detained several times without trial for his journalistic activities.

● **KABRAL BLAY-AMIHERE**, Ghana, is publisher and editor of *The Independent* newspaper, which has investigated the ministers of state as well as the cocoa industry. He serves as president of the West African Journalists Association and is also a member of the executive committee of the International Federation of Journalists.

● **ELISABETH OHENE**, England/Ghana, is deputy director of the BBC's daily African Service English-language programmes, including “Focus on Africa”. After a series of editorials questioning the military's overthrow of the constitutionally elected government, she was forced to leave Ghana in 1982.