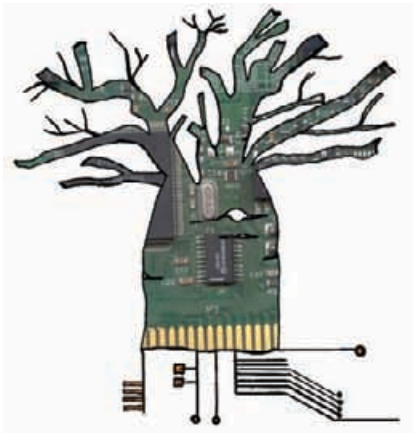
RHODES 23 JOURNALISM

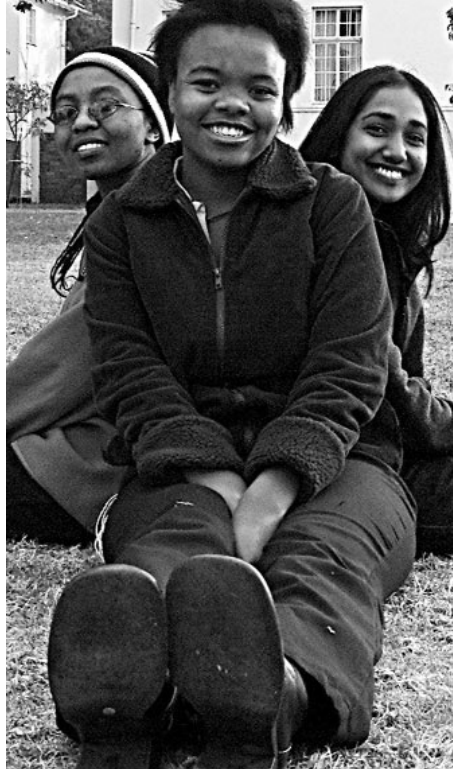
Review

Special Edition:
African Media in the Information Society

Highway Africa 2003



This edition of Review incorporates the discussions, debates and keynote lectures given at the Highway Africa 2003 Conference at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa in September. The theme of the conference was "Mainstreaming Media in the Information Society" and the event culminated in a Declaration which you will find in the centre pages as a pull-out poster. Look out for these stories marked by the Highway Africa logo (above). Also, in this Review is a CD on which you will find the conference presentations and two experimental multi-media websites produced in collaboration by Rhodes Department of Journalism and Media Studies and the University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communication. alivingstage.org (sponsored by Fulbright) used the Grahamstown Arts Festival to explore the lives of this town's residents. tenyearson.org (sponsored by Telkom) asks how the transition to democracy has affected the lives of ordinary South Africans. *See the back page.*



At WSIS

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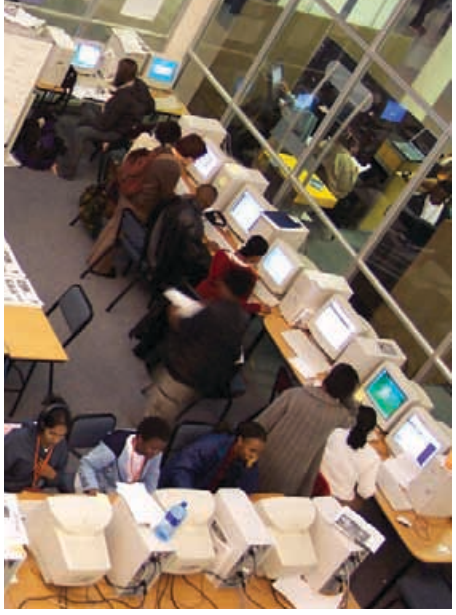
Outstanding Issues



Technology

Research

Review 23 December 2003

RHODES 23 JOURNALISM
Review

RJR 23 December 2003
http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za

Special Edition on African Media in the Global Information Society

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Special thanks to
- The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for financial support for this edition
- Sappi Fine Paper for providing us with the paper to print Review
- Highway Africa co-host: SABC
- Highway Africa partners: Department of Communication and MTN

for supporting the publication of the conference reports

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Africa. Media.

Those are our twin concerns as we move into this new moment in human history which is being called the "Information Society" or the "Information Age".

While "new", in that information now has a currency it never seemed to have before in the globalised realm of economics and politics, and also "new", in that the technology that underpins information is unprecedented in its power and reach, "information" is as old as the human drive to make meaning and has always been crucial to our negotiations of the world we live in.

So we need to have a sense of history, a sense of modesty and a sense of democracy as we contemplate the issues the "Information Age" throws up for us. (To get a little perspective read Juliet Were Oguttu's remark on the women of Africa who for millennia have kept cultural knowledge safe, page 26.)

It's amazing how every "new" technology that comes along is embraced with passion, is hailed as a saviour for all human ills, and is seen as full of promise alone.

We constantly forget that as we move forward we humans carry our baggage (visible and invisible) with us, we create out of what we already know – nothing is brand new, we taint what we encounter with who we already are. As Rudy Nadler-Nir points out (on page 46) new spaces are not free of the old discriminations.

And so to the debate before us.

The world process unfolding has some significant holes in it. And they can be summed up in two words: Africa. Media.

Africa: the agenda for discussion cannot be set by those who have always been in power. Exclusion by default cannot continue to be the way the conversation happens. This summit was proposed as necessary for the world by the country of Tunisia and set in motion by African concerns, it will go through Geneva and come back to Tunis. It should truly be a "Summit with Two Peaks" (in the words of Alain Modoux, the consultant to the Swiss WSIS delegate). Africa-Europe-Africa – with the concerns of the world's usually excluded seriously on the agenda.

Media: how is it possible that in the media-saturated world we live in, that this dimension of our lives does not immediately echo when we say "information"? Media in all its facets is crucial for the "Information Society", but more than this media is crucial for development and crucial for democracy, hence crucial for Africa. And this is borne out by the many stories we carry in this Review of innovative and extraordinary people using media all over this continent for change and progress.

So if you are involved in debates in the ongoing WSIS process or merely doing your job as a media worker engaged in reporting ICTs, keep these two words ringing in your mind.

Africa. Media.

Anthea Garman
Editor

At WSIS The

Guest editorial by Brenda Zulu

Brenda Zulu is a Zambian-based freelance journalist and correspondent for the online AfricaWoman newspaper. She is the recent recipient of a UNECA African Information Society Media Award for Best Female ICT Journalist. brendazulu2002@yahoo.co.in

The Information Society is upon us. The promise is for a knowledge-based society, yielding untold dividends for education, health, developments, democracy and much more. Seamless networking and knowledge flows from major centres to the village and back.

The reality, if current trends continue, might be very different, the dream become nightmare. The fruits of human creativity – from academia to media, from indigenous medicines to music being privatised, ownership concentrated into the hands of a few, and access restricted to those who can pay. The airwaves for radio, television and telecommunication being sliced up and sold to highest bidders. The Internet, once a promising new sphere increasingly commercialised and controlled.

Most threatening is the fear that behind the current drive towards the Information Society is the

promise... and the reality

relentless expansion of corporate control, stifling dissent and manufacturing consent. Global corporate interests are firmly in the greater share of spoils. Scant attention is paid to international regulation and the implication for the people and social development.

The people world-wide are also forging a new vision of the Information Society, one with human rights at its core. New forms of media and networking tools are being used to build global communities from the local levels to share knowledge, amplify marginalised voices, organise political action, empower participation, and sustain and celebrate cultural and intellectual diversity.

We must choose and then build the Information Society we want. Will it be one that suits the corporate elites, but excludes the majority? Or one that sustains and expands sustainability, human rights and peoples' dignity? The right to communicate is a universal human right. The emergence of the Information Society must see this right extended and reinforced to the benefit of all.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis 2005 aims to develop a common vision and understanding of the Information Society and to draw up a strategic plan of action for successfully adapting to the new society.

The summit offers African media a starting point. Journalists in Africa should have the right to communicate as a means to enhance human rights and to strengthen the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities. African governments should make sure that within each country there is freedom of expression.

Crucial to this is that African media should help build the Information Society based on principles of transparency, diversity, participation and social economic justice, and inspired by equitable gender, cultural and regional perspectives.

WSIS offers an important forum to promote this objective. The African media role in the Information Society should be to aim at broadening the WSIS agenda communication issues, and encouraging the participation of a wide spectrum of civil society groups in this process.

Journalists should help ensure that:

- information and knowledge are readily available for human development;
- there is affordable access to effective use of electronic networks through innovative and robust regulation and public investment; and
- public resources are not sold for private gains.

They should also:

- tackle information surveillance and censorship, government or commercial; and
- support community and people-centred media, traditional and new.

ICTs provide a tool to share local knowledge, culture and languages with others and build bridges between the local, national, regional and even global. In conclusion, Internet technology should be used for solidarity and struggles for justice rather than becoming a tool of capital consumption.

From Africa to

"African journalists have a new political space created by a new political will... to assist in taking Africa out of its marginalisation and making it a real player in the Information Society."

By Lyndall Shope-Mafole

The World Summit on the Information Socity originated from a proposal from Tunisia at the International Telecommunication Union Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis in 1998. It was outlined that participation should be from all sectors of society building on the experience from previous summits.

The WSIS is not an ICT summit but a summit about the application of ICTs cutting across and affecting almost all aspects of human activity.

It is vital, since it is the first time in history that heads of state of all countries will come together to discuss the challenges posed by the development of ICTS, the potential role of these technologies in meeting development objectives, improving the quality of life of people, agreeing on a common vision for the Information Society and planning to realise that vision.

The WSIS marks the formal transition from an industrial society or economy to an Information Society and knowledge economy. It will give the tools to those who are willing and ready to consciously embark on building the Information Society in their regions, countries or communities based on agreed principles, a plan of action and timelines.

The role of journalists is to influence the direction of global policy in building the Information Society – through active participation in discussions – shaping the agenda of the Global IS – by identifying new issues or new ways of looking at issues – and acting as a catalyst for building the Information Society – through information dissemination.

Africa has up to now been almost completely marginalised from the global economy. The most significant role that African journalists or media in general can play is mainstreaming Africa in the Information Society.

We declare our common desire and commitment to build a new kind of society premised on the Charter

Rhodes students Roseleen Nzioka, Haru Mutasa and Natarah Nadesan.

To Africans by

By Theresa Swinton

As part of an initiative to mainstream media for the Information Society and the African audience, Highway Africa 2003 is sending five African journalists and five journalism students to cover the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva.

"We want to cover the WSIS from an African perspective and make the WSIS relevant to African audiences, so that African audiences do not have to hear about WSIS from a European or American perspective," says Steven Lang, editor of SABCnews.com and editor of the Highway Africa News Agency.

"We are giving the news on WSIS an African spin."

The news agency will send daily reports to Africa on the debates and issues discussed at the summit published in a specific section of the SABCnews.com website.

"We will not only be representing the African perspective in Geneva, but also creating awareness in Africa," says Lang.

With financial support from Belgian Technical Co-operation, the 10 journalists working in the newsroom were given a week-long training course at Rhodes University in Grahamstown before the Highway Africa conference, and attended and reported on the conference in the lead-up to their coverage of WSIS.

Rebecca Wanjiku, a journalist from the People's Daily newspaper in Kenya, found the training and conference very beneficial and interesting.

"We learnt new things and I saw things with new eyes. ICTs are not all about technology and information but the freedom of access to information for everybody. The training course gave us the basics of looking at ICTs from an African perspective and in our own ways," she says.

Media organisations in Africa and around the world will have access to the information on SABCnews.com and are free to use the material if credit is given to the Highway Africa News Agency.

"The distinct difference of this newsroom is that it will only be staffed by African journalists which means that the news platforms that will receive our news feed will be confident that they are looking at the summit through African eyes," says Lang.

"This means that they will feel more comfortable about all the stories."

Angella Nabwowe, a Ugandan journalist, feels that this coverage will, in the long run, be able to cater to the needs of the marginalised and illiterate communities in Africa.

The African WSIS news agency team: (from left) Natarah Nadesan, Emrakeb Assefa, Steve Lang, Angella Nabwowe, Haru Mutasa, Thrishni Subramoney, Wairagala Wakabi, Rebecca Wanjiku and Roseleen Nzioka. In front is Guy Berger.
Photograph: Tshepo Ikaneng

the World

of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Declaration, characterised by universal access to and use of information for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge.

The common vision is to build an Information Society that is inclusive; where all persons exercise their right to freedom of expression and their access to and use of reliable information and plurality of opinions; as well as access to a wide range of content, including material reflecting national and regional cultures and content relevant to local communities.

The Declaration of Principles identifies 10 key principles for building the Information Society. They are:

- ICT infrastructure
- Access to information and knowledge
- Capacity building
- Building confidence, trust and security
- Enabling environments
- ICT applications
- Cultural identity, linguistic diversity, local content
- Ethical dimensions
- International and regional co-operation
- Role of governments, private sector and civil society

African journalists have a new political space created by a new political will, through the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), to assist in taking Africa out of its marginalisation and making it a real player in the Information Society.

African journalists have a challenge to ensure that no aspect of the Information Society should lack an African element.

Shope-Mafole is the Chairperson for the South African Presidential National Commission on Information Society and Development.

Africans

To receive reports from the African team send your email address to highwayafrica@ru.ac.za

"I work for a radio station that caters to the needs of marginalised rural communities. As the Highway Africa News Agency I think we need to look at the broader perspective, and then focus on the marginalised Third World communities, where Africa falls."

One of the major problems faced by the African journalist moving into, and covering the developments in, the Information Society is lack of resources and lack of understanding around ICT development and the impact that ICTs can have on African audiences.

"The media have not taken the time to understand a lot of the technical jargon involved in the technology debate. When we do understand it, we do not bother to translate it more simply so that our audience can understand the issues, and we need to work on this," says Lang.

With the 10 journalists coming from different cultural backgrounds and African countries, the impact of the training course and their experiences in Geneva should bring about some change in the coverage of ICTs. It is this goal which has attracted funds for the Geneva trip from the Swiss Development Co-operation , the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

"At first the training course material was a bit confusing because we do not know much about ICTs in Ethiopia," says Emrakeb Assefa. "But I am privileged and excited about the change that I can make by being part of a group of committed journalists whose aim is to make Africa heard. Africa is normally sidelined but now we are telling the news about Africa, to Africans, by Africans."

The training workshop focused on African technology, policy, regulations and the WSIS process and focused on how to cover these issues from a distinctly African perspective.

As well as this training programme, three of the staff attended the WSIS PrepCom Three meeting in Geneva which also served as a good training platform for the coverage of the issues at WSIS, says Lang. See the reports at www.highwayafrica.org.za

For the five journalism students this is the opportunity of a lifetime. "I am terrified and excited because I will be the only person coding for the website running off the SABC," says Natarah Nadesan, a South African student from Rhodes University. "The experience of working in the Highway Africa newsroom has really given me confidence, but I know that in Geneva we will be working around the clock."

"I am excited and proud to be representing Africa at the WSIS," says Haru Mutasa, a Rhodes student. "I am the only Zimbabwean in the team and it is going to be tough, but will be such a great learning experience. It already has been."

"It will no doubt be a milestone summit in Geneva and I'm happy that I'll be there from the very beginning. I plan to share whatever I learn when I return to the Durban Institute of Technology to enhance the Internet programmes we have started there," says Thrishni Subramoney.

The outcome of the WSIS conference and how the Information Society will impact on Africa and African audiences is unknown, but if the enthusiasm and dedication of these journalists is anything to go by, the future of ICT coverage and use in African media is beginning to look a little brighter.

Context World

E-poch defining

By Nkenke Kekana

The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector is epoch-defining, it is the fastest consumer technology penetration in human history.

Therefore one must consider whether the globalisation of industries is a threat or opportunity. There needs to be levelling of the playing field between developing and developed countries. Developing countries require skills, basic infrastructure and political stability.

The nature of the labour market has evolved from the industrial age to the information age. There has been an economic impact of ICTs on the economy (including the labour market). ICTs can improve productivity, promote the creation of wealth and improve chances of attracting investment. ICTs have improved efficiencies in the work environment and have radically reduced the cost for companies of collecting, analysing, retrieving and re-using information. Despite the benefits, ICTs have placed significant challenges on the management of workforces.

Until the 1990s, telecommunications have been treated as a natural monopoly across the world and were administered by governments. Then economic and technological developments necessitated a review of the treatment of telecommunications.

WTO, ITU, EU and other international bodies reassessed the increasing importance of telecoms and their expanded role in the market. This resulted in telecoms reform and the design of the so-called optimal institutional structure.

There needs to be a rebalancing of international and local tariffs, improvement of management to increase efficiency, maximisation of cash flows to finance companies, a consistent effort to have efficient working lines, and the adoption of new technologies.

Nepad's main ICT development objectives include doubling teledensity to two lines per 100 people by 2005, with an adequate level of access for households; lowering the cost and improving reliability of service; achieving e-readiness for all countries in Africa; developing and producing a pool of ICT-proficient youth and students from which Africa can draw trainee ICT engineers, programmers and software developers; and developing local-content software, based on Africa's cultural legacy.

The responses and reactions to Nepad objectives were that an e-Africa Commission was formed to serve as the ICT task force of Nepad in pursuit of Nepad ICT development objectives. This can be realised through, among other things, embracing market liberalisation and competition so as to realise all the benefits associated with market liberalisation. If we can meet the challenge of computer literacy and access to computers, it is connectivity that is our next main challenge.

The inauguration of the SAT3/WASC/SAFE submarine cable has brought international connectivity to many more African countries.

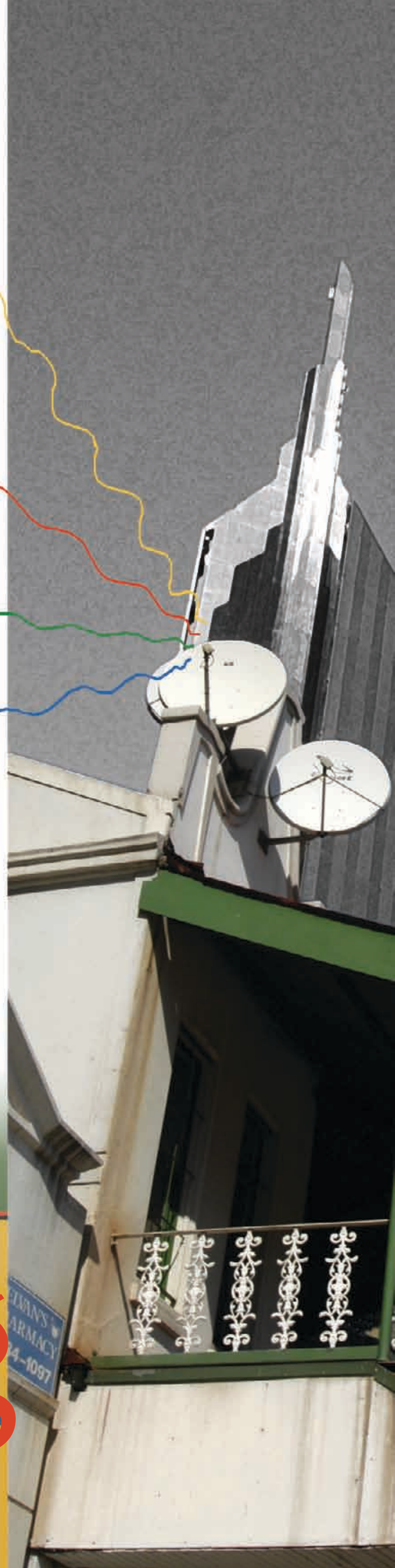
But how ready is a country to gain the benefits offered by ICTs generally in terms of policy, infrastructure and ground-level initiatives? Too often developing countries tackle e-readiness by focusing on either the need to improve the e-commerce capacity of the business sector or the need to improve access to ICTs in disadvantaged communities. Laws must be tailor-made to address unique policy, infrastructure and ground level realities reflected within each country and the broader regional goals.

There are three powerful means of directly improving e-readiness and harnessing ICTs for social and economic advancement: firstly establishing the policy framework for action, then building the necessary infrastructure and lastly undertaking ground level projects.

The media can contribute much to the educational process: they should create awareness of the advantages that ICTs will bring to a country and its people; prioritise teaching of computer literacy and mobilise communities to take responsibility for their own development.

In conclusion, the assessment of e-readiness is the first step towards converting good intentions into planned actions that will bring real change to people's lives. Each country must take its own path to e-readiness. Access to computers through joint community projects sponsored by business should be expanded and access to the Internet increased through business-government partnerships and liberalised regulation.

Nkenke Kekana is Group Executive: Regulatory and Public Policy for SA Telkom



Interrogate the Information Society

By Guy Gough Berger

If there is one thing journalists should know about the "Information Society", it's this: never use the phrase as if its meaning speaks for itself.

This is one of the most slippery and contentious phrases yet to grace contemporary discourse. For a start, why "Information Society" and not "Knowledge Society"? And why "society" and not "economy"? This is not academic semantics. There are wholly different meanings at stake with different implications for journalists, politicians, policy makers and many more.

It is also very political. Compare these divergent interpretations of "Information Society":

- "An invention of the needs of globalisation by capitalism and its supporting governments" (Media Development, the journal of the World Association for Christian Communications).
- The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a time when "makers of equipment, programmes and channels will be licking their lips (accompanied by) … a deluge of hymns, hosannas, panegyrics and eulogies" (Antonio Pasquali, former Unesco official).
- "Information and communication for all" (Adama Samassekou, president of the WSIS preparatory committee).

Part of the diversity in how people understand "Information Society" is also the result of whether they use these buzzwords to describe the current epoch – or something up ahead. For some folk, we're already in the "Information Society". For others, it's still a goal.

However, it makes a difference whether we're talking here and now, or about some state in the future:

If we are not there yet, is it really inevitable that we are en route? If so, will the "First" World arrive first, and with what consequences for the rest of us?

If we have already arrived, from whence did we come? How much history continues to be with us? And, is this destination an end in itself – or a means to yet another end, and if so, what? Is there a post-"Information Society" era ahead?

In a nutshell, is the "Information Society" something we already see and know, or something yet to be decided and determined? Could it be both things simultaneously – something here and now, and something still to be? Answer: it could – if we conclude that it exists for some, and not for others.

In this hybrid view, some of us have arrived in the land of plenty; the rest lag behind, empty-handed and hopeless, and urgently need to play catch-up or even leapfrog. Yet even if you think this sums things up, another issue needs to be resolved. If "Information Society" is a label for something (present or future), what is this thing?

Continued on page 8

"Information Society" discourse rests on three assumptions about goodness, power and neutrality that journalists should not take as givens.

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In order to explore this question, we can draw from academic Frank Webster, who has usefully distinguished five schools of thought on the "Information Society", each with their own primary emphasis:

1. Technicist approach – tools for the job:

The assumption in this view is that we can define a society by its production technology: the Stone Age, the Iron Age, the Steam Age... now, the Information Age. In this perspective, the key means of production are neither human brains nor heavy machinery, but Information and Communications Technology (ICT). For example, even modern farming hinges on computers.

Webster's reservation is that this view characterises a whole society on the basis of technology. He opposes reducing human existence in this way, and he argues that society determines the nature of technology, rather than vice versa.

2. Economistic definition – info rules, OK?

This approach goes beyond tech to look at the wider economy. Accordingly, the "Information Society" is where information is both the critical raw material and the central product. The modern value chain, in this view, is determined by adding information at various stages. As a result, much information has become a tradeable commodity with financial value, and information industries contribute a growing percentage of GNP.

Limits to this view immediately come to mind. The collapse of Internet businesses and the troubles in telecoms show that "old industry" commodities are still essential: people cannot live on data alone! A further criticism, made by Webster, is the failure to distinguish between different kinds of information. Pornography may be a major money-spinner, but its social value is rather different to that of investigative journalism.

Further, by reducing economies to what Marx called the forces of production (the relation of humanity to technology and nature), this view ignores differences in the social relations of production (the relation of people to each other). For example, does it make sense to call everything "Information Society" when there are significant differences between neoliberal, social-democratic and state-commandist types of capitalism? Worst of all, the economistic approach implies that we can successfully harness ICTs for development, as in the paradigm of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), without needing full freedom of expression. In other words, this approach fosters the illusion of an African Information Society without free speech.

3. Occupational – information workers of the world:

This third school of thought interprets the "Information Society" as referring to increasing numbers of jobs dealing with information – lawyers, data capturers, accountants, brokers, public relations officers, educationists, politicians, entertainers, etc.

The critique of this is that it is not necessarily the case that there are proportionately more info-workers than previously. Much of the heavy work has simply been relocated to the Third World. In addition, the approach is seen as fuzzy, because information work is a factor in any job. It becomes difficult to separate out the occupations. Take a tour-bus driver who talks into a microphone while ferrying passengers to a destination: is this work within the information or the transportation sector?

4. Spatial school – real-time global village:

In this approach, physical distance and time constraints are seen as being eliminated by information networks. Manuel Castells points to an integrated global informational system wherein nodes and hubs (like the Wall Street stock exchange) determine the state of the entire world's economy. In this view, what defines the "Information Society" is the transnational interconnectedness and interdependence due to the speed and spread of information flows.

Again, there are limits to this approach. There have long been international linkages, eg: global post and telecoms. So what has changed to the extent that we need a new name to describe it? In addition, it is debatable how much space and time has actually shrunk, when there's increasing congestion on the Internet, on roads and at airports. In short, how convincing is it to proclaim an "Information Society" on the basis of hype about information networks transcending space and time?

5. E-nough information – mediated messages everywhere:

This cultural interpretation of the "Information Society" takes cognisance of the ubiquitous presence of information. For example, previous generations were not exposed to brands in the same way as today. This view claims that the huge volume of information today defines and shapes our very identities. It affects our politics, public life, clothes, tastes, aspirations and dreams.

To the extent that this interpretation captures a certain (expanding) reality, the question is whether it merits the neutral label of "Information Society"? Why not "Entertainment Society", or "Commercial Images Society"? The criticism here is that the glare of the "Information Society" phrase blinds us to the concept of "cultural imperialism". Who wants an "Information Society" that has McDonalds arches in each and every human settlement?

Finally, and as pointed out by Webster, there seems to be a paradox of more information, but less meaning. We become inured to televised images of

violence; we screen out the muzak and the blaring billboards. The phrase "Information Society" becomes a misnomer.

To sum up these five approaches, one can say that "Information Society" is often used to mean one or more of the following features:

- The role of ICT as a means of production
- The importance of information in national economies
- A changing occupational structure
- The importance of global networked systems
- The ubiquity of information in cultural life

The criticism of these interpretations of "Information Society" is that they overstate the case singularly and even collectively. As demonstrated, they detract from other vital social issues like the need for traditional industries and media freedom. Similarly, they skim over the quality of information and the social relations of production. There's a blind spot about real space and time, and silence about cultural contestation. The gender question is absent.

The lesson for journalists from this assessment? Immediately you encounter the IS buzzwords, interrogate which feature/s people have in mind. And keep a sharp eye out for what they exclude in the process.

That's just the start, however. Because you also need to know that whatever the one-sided emphasis (technicist, economistic, cultural, etc.) in interpreting "Information Society", there also tend to be three common – and dubious – assumptions at play in the discourse. These assumptions are: that information is a good thing, that it is powerful, and that ICTs are neutral.

Here's how and why you should question these beliefs:

Suppose the US exhibits many of the five features highlighted above, and therefore counts as an "Information Society". Yet, we know that this is also a society that has not helped its citizens ask, or answer, the post-September 11 question: "Why do they hate us so much?" And if the information in this same society feeds its citizens unilateralism and jingoism which, inter alia, conflates Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, then we need to ask more fundamental questions. Information, it appears, is not always and automatically a good thing. To avoid a "Dis-Information Society", we need to focus on more than the quantity of information. Quality is also, a surely critical matter if we are to accept that information is a "good thing".

Information is supposed to be power – and nowhere more so than in the "Information Society" paradigm. But this cliché is open to qualification. For example, warfare may be increasingly information-alised, but nonetheless heavy weapons, not words, still do the killing. Take also the troubles over trade protectionism – arguably these are not to do with issues of information, but simply with interests. Further, an exaggerated belief in the power of information can misread causes (and remedies) – for example, diagnosing child abusers as simply information-deficient.

In fact, the notion of information as power often assumes that humans are rational beings, guided by facts and logic. This ignores the deep emotions and contradictions at work in how we negotiate, co-opt or ignore information for our own purposes.

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There is, in short, more to power (and powerlesness) than information.

In most "Information Society" thinking, ICTs are assumed to be a neutral tool that anyone can use, for any purpose. But consider this: personal computers derive from a society premised on atomised individuals; whereas a community ethos would see scores of dumb terminals linked to powerful computer servers. Another example: today's entry-level new computers and software offer power and features way beyond that which most users need. But you can't get cheaper and simpler devices – which, in particular, might help increase workstation access in Africa. This is not even to touch on the issue of the dominant languages and purposes embedded in most software packages. The point, therefore, is that ICTs come with their own baggage.

Summing up thus far, not only does "Information Society" discourse tend to highlight some things and hide others, it also rests on three assumptions about goodness, power and neutrality that journalists should not take as givens. And yet, despite all this, a salvage operation, rather than a death sentence, is needed for the concept.

Here's why:

First, the phrase has a relatively popular currency, and cannot be wished away. Second, it serves as a strong mobiliser: like the catch-phrase "sustainable development", it has resulted in a major UN Summit – the WSIS. Third, the notion of the "Information Society" puts important items onto the international public agenda. In turn, this process will profoundly influence global policies on investment, donor direction and state regulation.

Lastly, the three-year-long WSIS process provides an opportunity to explore the role of information, communication and technology in solving social problems. It is a chance for African journalists to give our interpretation of what this "Information Society" could and should be like. And here we come to one final aspect where media people should actively engage with talk about the "Information Society".

This aspect concerns the uneven development of informationalism. In recognition of this, the "Information Society" paradigm is often interpreted in terms of "information rich" and "information poor". The challenge that follows is to deploy the latest ICTs so that the "have-nots" can vault over fixed "stages of development" and thereby join the "haves" already in the "Information Society". In this view, African journalists, armed with ICTs, would be part of the mission to spread the information goodies of the rich to the ranks of those who are deprived. Journalism is reinvented as an e-enabled charity crusade, and ICT is the equivalent of powerful weaponry.

This perspective is not entirely without truth, although it is clearly an overly optimistic view of the role of journalists and ICTs, even in conditions where there is full freedom of expression. More fundamentally, it is also a very biased model. It sees the digital divide as a chasm that prevents the Third World from drinking at the fount of information in the First. Accordingly, Africa is seen as backward, and in danger of getting even further behind as the "Information Society" surges ahead on the advanced side of the divide.

Absent in this whole discourse is the idea that (ordinary) Africans have something to say and contribute to a global "Information Society". Missing is the recognition that the so-called "info rich" are ignorant about many things. As a result, indigenous knowledge, wisdom and culture (if they are not co-opted and ripped-off) are entirely undervalued. Information about African experiences is discounted or marginalised.

An alternative paradigm sees Africa's digitally-excluded not so much as needing to enter the "Information Society" and share in its benefits, but as helping to change that selfsame society. In this vein, information about African experiences can help to shape a world that takes cognisance of issues that would otherwise be left off the table.

In particular, an African media contribution to defining and shaping a global "Information Society" could highlight the importance of issues such as:

- freedom of expression and media freedom;
- combatting racist information which portrays Africans as backward, and as lacking any information of value;
- values that are humanity-centred, not technology- or economy-centred;
- values of community, not only of individualism;
- priority not purely of profit margins, but of mixed measures to promote popular capacity to receive and to impart information;
- information and communication towards promoting peace and putting an end to poverty;
- counters to information imperialism and colonialism;
- respect for minority languages and culture; and
- information and communication to build international solidarity with victims of wars, famines and repression.

At the 2002 WSIS preparatory meeting in Mali the participants spelt out a welcome dialectic in their vision. Thus, their declaration mentioned not only the benefits that global Information Society development could bring to Africa, but also what Africa could contribute to it. The question now is: how?

Part of the answer is that within such a new and preferred paradigm, African media need to impact on discussions and decisions about the global "Information Society".

This, then, is what's needed from you:

- Engage with the concept and the process, and put the issues onto the agenda of your own coverage.
- Critique the common rhetoric and one-sided and exaggerated views on what "Information Society" means.
- Monitor government and other agencies who commit to information issues.
- Ensure that African voices join the global discussion.

In sum, Africa's journalists can, and should, bring the global "Information Society" story to the continent's audiences, and bring these people into that same story.

In this way, we can move from margins to mainstream in regard to making useful sense out of the "Information Society". As key stakeholders in the debate, we need to help transform the discourse, and help shape the dreams – or the dire results – that will flow from it.

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Bamako-Geneva

The Summit with two peaks

Africa's developmental needs were central to the debates raised at the WSIS preparatory meeting held in Bamako, Mali in May last year. They should remain central in Geneva, and the media has a role to play in ensuring that this happens...

By Aida Opoku-Mensah

The Information Society, characterised by technological convergence through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) presents some enormous challenges for Africa.

This is one of the reasons why the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), led by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) upon the request of its 53 member states, was introduced.

AISI is an action framework (a continental digital agenda see www.uneca.org/aisi) that has been the basis for information and communication activities in Africa for the last six to seven years and is about giving Africans the means to improve the quality of their lives and to fight against poverty.

The advent of the Information Society in general, and its relevance to Africa's development needs were central to the debates raised at the Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Bamako, Mali from 28 to 30 May 2002.

Organised by the ECA in collaboration with the Malian Government, the major themes of this event sought to position the continent and its unique needs vis-à-vis the digital era.

Participation of rural communities

The rural poor lack access to information vital to their lives and livelihoods and this has to be addressed. ICTs are able to improve and enhance two-way communications and can support participatory development, as well as allow the voices of the poor to be heard.

The current technological revolution allows for rural areas to benefit from ICTs through a range of options that can be operated individually or within small or local networks not requiring elaborate infrastructure. Senegal, for instance, through the national telecommunication company SONATEL decided to expand rural telephony and supported privately owned telecentres that sprung up throughout the country. This is one way of promoting the use of ICTs in rural areas.

Integrating African languages

As the use of the Internet and its resources spread, it is becoming clear that Africans need information in their own languages as a way to gain access to the Information Society. However African languages have been marginalised by the Internet revolution, and there are grave implications if this continues, including the loss of cultural heritage and intellectual property rights. One clear benefit of adapting local languages is that locally relevant information is most likely to stimulate demand for information services that can optimise the use of ICTs. There are some innovative initiatives being undertaken worth mentioning. The African Languages Technology Initiative (ALTI) of Nigeria, funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is one such example.

The project is a collaboration with the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, and according to Prof Francis Egbokhare of ALTI: "there are over 2 000 languages in Africa and within the next 100 years or less, over 90% of them and their accompanying cultures, folk wisdom, medical practices, fauna, verbal arts, etc. will be gone".

Egbokhare further adds: "Language is a huge resource, an encyclopaedia, and is our window to the world. ICTs provide us with an opportunity to tackle the problems of endangerment and language death pragmatically and cost effectively. "

This initiative highlights the role that universities and institutions of higher education can play in supporting the emergence of the Information Society through research and development activities.

Research and development hubs

The work being done through research (innovation and incubation) in other parts of the world involves the thinking and imagination of scholars, students, government and business officials, and other users in virtually every field, to help figure out how to harness computing and communications capabilities for human needs, interests, and aspirations. It is through such activities that Africa can define its real needs and how these needs are to be addressed. Research can play a critical role in generating knowledge about what particular groups and countries need, and about what approaches seem to be most effective in resolving specific problems. It can improve the quality of information on which effective policy must be based, as well as the solidity of the political process that stands behind formulation and implementation of that policy.

Recognising the significant role that higher education institutions can play, ECA and the Ford Foundation under the AISI framework are piloting research and development activities at the Addis Ababa University and the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), to develop applications for e-government through the use of Open Source Software. The project is part of the Africa Learning Network (ALN) that includes SchoolNet Africa, Out-of-School Youth Network and African Universities Network.

Role of the media

Awareness on the Information Society is still very limited and yet addressing the role of ICTs in advancing Africa's development requires society to develop a better understanding of the new means of interaction being offered. Furthermore, apart from being an essential means for information dissemination, the mass media plays a critical role in spreading awareness in Africa on the importance and benefits of the Information Society. Newspapers, radio and television provide an easy, accessible and cheap means of carrying information to end-users.

However, the African media are lagging behind in their coverage of Information Society issues. A study commissioned by ECA on the state of ICT reporting in nine African countries (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal) reveals that with notable exceptions, the media in Africa are far from being a promoter of the Information Society in Africa. The study provides a startling revelation of how ill-prepared African media are when it comes to reporting on these issues. Most editors interviewed from the selected media underscored the fact that there is simply no real capacity for reporting in this particular area, and this is a serious handicap. According to the editor of the Nation Publications in Malawi, Steve Nhlane: "We have not reached that stage as a nation where IT matters would attract serious attention from our readers, despite their

importance. Malawi as a nation is not yet computerised, so to speak."

This assertion is startling because the media should be at the forefront, asking questions and seeking answers on how Africa can address its poor information infrastructure and what governments and society at large are doing. This is perhaps one reason why there has been limited coverage on the WSIS process with hardly any news on countries' summit preparations.

Media and the WSIS process

Given that the media is a forum as well as a channel for communicating diverse ideas and information that undoubtedly helps the public at large to receive and impart information and knowledge, they are central to promoting debate on the WSIS process. Sadly, the African media have not really engaged in the process in the way that is possible and coverage, if any, has been restricted to events reporting rather than any in-depth assessment of what the main issues are or could be.

In collaboration with the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), ECA organised the first media forum during Bamako 2002. The main objectives of the forum were to discuss the role of the media in the development of the Information Society, to outline the challenges of globalisation and the knowledge economy, and to create a network of journalists for promoting Africa's digital opportunities. Some of the key recommendations included:

- the need for the introduction of new technologies at media training schools in order that practitioners can master the use of ICTs in their work;
- development of strategies for the creation of African content that finances and sustains the media; and
- encouraging "ICT media" to promote the Information Society in Africa.

As this media forum was an official pre-event of Bamako 2002, the recommendations on media and the Information Society were included in the declaration and are part of the official documentation from Africa for the WSIS Declaration at the Geneva leg of the summit.

ECA in collaboration with its partners is developing training modules on ICT4D for use by media training institutions on the continent aimed at editors as well as reporters.

According to Remmy Nweke, IT and telecoms correspondent of the Lagos-based Champion Newspapers in Nigeria: IT training for media chiefs on the importance of ICTs and how they could assist or help the industry to grow as well as boost their businesses, especially with on-line publication is one of the key recommendations for rectifying the poor state of ICT for Development reporting in African countries.

Tunis via Geneva

For the summit that will be held in Tunis in 2005, we need to prepare ourselves and stimulate debate, raise awareness, discuss the complexities of the Information Society and probe for government positions on some of the key issues. How will countries benefit from the summit? How have preparations gone and what still needs to be done? Journalists themselves need to be proactive in asking these questions as well as seeking the right answers.

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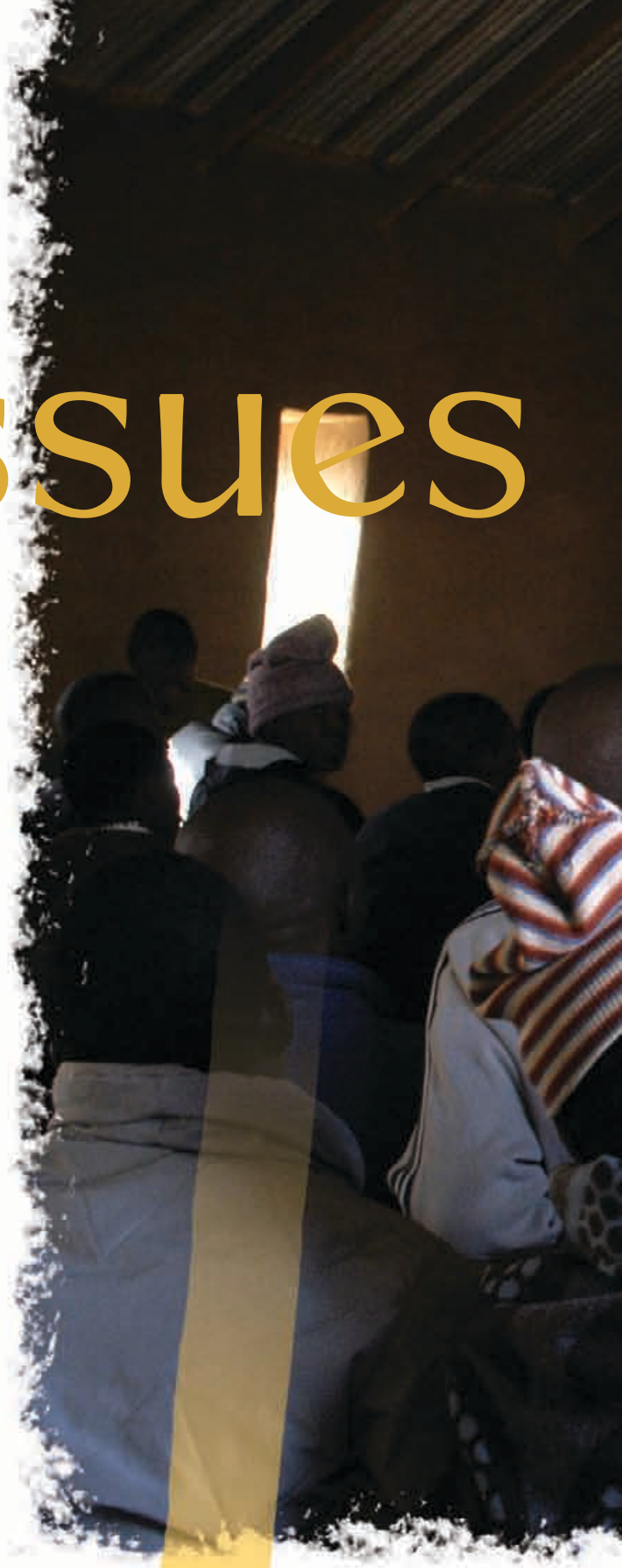
On the table: Africa's issues



Alice Munyua is a representative of the African Civil Society Caucus. Here she highlights some of their key concerns and priority issues.

The right to communicate

The advent of ICTs has changed human rights practice immensely. For African Civil Society Organisations there are two challenges with respect to ICTs.

The first is to unpack the human rights issues around the disparate development of ICTs on the continent. The second is to learn how to use ICTs effectively as an additional tool in both our work and in the broader struggle for human rights on our continent.

An information and communication society should have people and human needs at its centre underlining the importance of human rights standards as the core set of principles guiding its development.

In order to ensure freedom of expression and the right to information, WSIS should therefore not only reaffirm Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also commit to its active enforcement. In addition, the principles of a better-balanced flow of information, free circulation of ideas, press freedom, participation in the communication process, and knowledge sharing, will only become meaningful inasmuch as they are supported by a consistent articulation of rights.

Sustainable democratic development

An equitable Information Society must be based on sustainable economic and social development and democratic principles. ICTs have great potential for developing more democratic and participative processes of governance, from the local to the international level.

But technologies also have the potential to perpetuate the expansion of existing, undemocratic power relations and inequalities within and between peoples and nations. Democratic and sustainable development of the Information Society can therefore not be left solely to market forces; in order to balance commercial objectives with legitimate social interests, recognition should be given to the need for appropriate regulation and development of public services, and the principle of equitable access to services and affordable cost should be reaffirmed.

ICT use is also creating new environmental hazards. In view of mainstreaming ICTs into sustainable development, the action plan should include concrete proposals and policies to:

- develop renewable energy resources, particularly for remote communities;
- improve resource efficiency;
- dematerialise and reduce waste;
- increase the useful life of hardware;
- improve recycling conditions and ensure safe disposal of discarded ICT hardware and parts; and
- encourage the development of alternatives to toxic ICT components.

Appropriate policy and regulation

Most telecommunications policies developed in Africa have been the result of adoption of 'best practice' recommendations from international organisations and developed countries. The lack of local solutions peculiar to Africa denies the resulting policy the appropriate African perspective.

Intellectual property rights

The privatisation of knowledge and information through copyright, patents and trademarks is contributing to the growth of inequality and the exploitation of the poorest peoples and communities. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) has affected the public's access to knowledge in the public domain and to copyrighted works; limited legitimate opportunities for cultural appropriations; and stifled learning, creativity and innovation thus placing curbs on the democratisation of knowledge.

Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) favours industrialised countries and transactional copyright industries, while limiting the freedom of countries, especially less-industrialised ones, to design IPR regimes to meet their economic, social and cultural needs.

IPR must serve public benefits before personal ones by taking into account existing state obligations under international human rights instruments. The strengthening of IPR regimes should be pro-actively thwarted by other legal instruments related to bio-diversity such as the Convention on Bio-diversity (CBD).

Particular attention should be paid to the opportunities and challenges of technological development of women and marginal economic agents. The WSIS must therefore include, as a principle and theme, the maintenance and growth of the commonwealth of human knowledge as a means of reducing global inequality and of providing the conditions for intellectual creativity, sustainable development and respect for human rights.

Community media

The marginal role accorded community media ignores the crucial significance of these media for the majority of the world population. In many parts of the world, community broadcasting thrives as part of a pluralistic media environment—radio stations owned and controlled by the communities they serve, whether these are communities of language, interest or geography.

The constitutional, legal and policy frameworks for community broadcasting in most African countries are not explicitly supportive of the growth of community media. There is a need for clearly supportive definitions and the recognition of the specificity of community media as a third voice apart from state media and private commercial media, which is crucial for the viability of democracy through participation.

Literacy, education, research

Urgent attention should be paid to the potential positive and negative impacts of ICTs on the issues of illiteracy in national and international languages of the great majority of the world's people.

Literacy, education and research are fundamental components of information and knowledge societies.

Knowledge creation and acquisition should be nurtured as a participatory and collective process and should not be considered a one-way flow.

But only an informed and educated citizenry with access to the means and outputs of pluralistic research can fully participate in and effectively contribute to knowledge societies.

Women's empowerment

Evidence of governments' commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment remain largely absent from the WSIS agenda and more specifically from the Bamako Declaration.

The WSIS Declaration must adopt as a statement of principle, a fundamental commitment to gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment, and recognise these as non-negotiable and essential prerequisites to equitable and people-centred development within the Information Society.

Governance

In an information and communication society, good governance must be based on the values of participation, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability.

This particularly implies the democratic management of international bodies dealing with ICTs. Given the borderless characteristics of ICTs, decision-making bodies should respect the principles of democracy and openness, as well as sovereignty.

In particular, the management of the core resources of the Internet, like the Internet protocols, standards and identifiers such as domain names and IP addresses, must serve the public interest at the global, national and local levels.

Furthermore, any decision made on protocols and standards should be compatible with international human rights standards articulated in the International Bill of Rights (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and specially the rights to freedom of expression, to privacy, and the principle of non-discrimination.

The current management of Internet names and numbers and other related mechanisms should be re-examined with the full participation of all stakeholders in light of serving public interests and compatibility with human rights standards.

Other regional and international processes

The weakness in representation of African concerns in international conferences assumes both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. The quantitative aspect is evident in the low number of African organisations that actively participate, while the little weight accorded African concerns indicates a qualitative weakness.

Essential decisions are already being taken, in other regional and international political arenas, that have huge potential consequences for knowledge, education and culture. It is important for African civil society organisations to map decision-making in other political arenas that impact or intersect so that a monitoring system can be established to ensure that decisions taken in other political arenas that relate to the Information Society are consistent with the general framework established by the WSIS process.

It is also important that the international legal frameworks give preference to those bodies which empower the effective participation of developing countries in decision-making processes, to redress the current trend of exporting frameworks developed by Western countries to the global level.

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Where is the African voice in this debate?

By Theresa Swinton

What does the summit mean for Africa and African media? The impact of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) for the African journalist and the African voice is one of the main debates on the African continent at the moment.

Alain Modoux, the adviser to the Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), said: "ICTs provide immense opportunities to promote and foster social, economic, cultural and political development in African countries," and "will help leapfrog the development divide and accelerate efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality."

Modoux highlighted the need to make ICTs accessible and affordable to everyone, and the ways in which access to ICTs can promote and develop cultural diversity, multilinguism and the human capacity for education and training.

However, problems of infrastructure, connectivity, cost of use and community access points are a major concern. With the barriers of illiteracy, access to content, information, knowledge, language and training, it does seem as though this proposal is too unrealistic for African.

Is it viable for the African continent, which contends with more economic, political and infrastructure problems than most globally 'industrialised' countries, to make this transition into the Information Society?

Governmental policies dictate the access and expense of acquiring ICTs, and high taxation systems hinder the importation of ICT equipment.

"With the correct infrastructure in place, new technologies should become cheaper over time. But in many African countries the state monopolises access to information and telecommunications tariffs. If the governments changed their policies they would undoubtedly lose a main source of income," said Modoux.

"We live in a paradoxical world where telecommunications tariffs are proportionately higher in African countries than in more industrialised countries. It is not a problem of technology, but rather a problem of economic and political infrastructure. There needs to be a political will to change things."

In particular, the right to freedom of expression is an especially poignant issue for the African journalist, who has been contending with and still continues to contend with governmental censorship.

"This is a consequence of the traditional mistrust by certain governments of the media and its potential, and the division between the so-called mainstream media and the newer smaller media," said Modoux.

Paragraph 51 of the WSIS draft declaration states that "the existence of free and independent media should be in accordance with the legal system of every country".

"This paragraph should change, as it is not acceptable to put national legal systems above the media," said Modoux. If this paragraph does not change, it basically allows any country that imposes censorship to continue in its restriction of access to information.

But how can the African journalist challenge poor infrastructure and restrictive governmental policies in place?

"Media workers can participate in the WSIS process of amending the draft declaration and action plan by taking part in discussion forums on the Internet and sending comments and amendments to the draft," said Modoux.

Yet, there is a paradoxical situation placing the African journalist in a difficult position: how to participate in Internet discussion forums when there is no access to Internet in certain African countries?

What then can be done to ensure that the African voice does not become sidelined in the Information Society? And what are the benefits of making an African transition into this society?

"The emergence of new technologies and Internet means that Africa will have fantastic new opportunities. Newspapers can be put on the Internet and sent around the world. For example, Le Soleil, a newspaper in Dakar has been placed on the Internet. There are thousands of Senegalese in Europe who are now able to access this newspaper over the web," said Modoux.

Alain Modoux

Sourcing would also benefit. "At present African journalists are limited to either traditional governmental sources, which are not always accurate, or international news agencies. Internet access increases the amount of information that can be researched, and the number of sources used. It also means that the journalist can check the accuracy and reliability of the news," said Modoux. "It is possible to work differently and exchange information among journalists on a global scale."

One problem that Modoux foresees is language. "Many African countries have many different local languages and concentrate on those local languages, but it is difficult to use them internationally. There should be an emphasis on language courses."

Another problem is the underestimation of management in traditional media. There needs to be an emphasis on training in order to master production and management skills. "At the level of community media there needs to be careful consideration in the investment of new technology. This is a domain which is changing every six months, so it is necessary to invest in equipment which will be useful for a longer period of time," he said.

ICT literacy is also an issue for African journalists. "The International Federation of Journalists and World Associated Newspapers have training programmes in Africa which teach journalists to use ICTs and create websites and improve radio stations."

Will Africa be able to move with the rest of the globe into the Information Society?

This is something which the World Summit on the Information Society is trying to ensure, however it is governmental and infrastructural policies which need to change, not only the attitudes of journalists.

There is an understanding that Africa needs to make the transition, but questions of viability, cost and training are still at the forefront of this debate.

"At the moment, African journalists that have access to equipment are as skilled as any other journalists," said Modoux, "but it is the access and cost of equipment which is creating the digital divide between African and global media."

Context Media

The stories in the details

By Sim Kyazze

A famous journalism adage is that "the story is in the details".

For the world Information Society, those details might be in the mind-blowing technological advances in recent years and the dizzying alternative news sources; and in the increased novelty in story telling.

But for the African continent, the story is in the details of the content; and specifically, in how that content is being told.

African academics, news purveyors and media executives have all lately been focused on how the African story is being told, since content is as much a part of the Information Society as the technology advances.

The various interested parties are, however, not agreed on how 'the African story' should be told.

At the seventh Highway Africa Conference in Grahamstown, South Africa in September, Mathatha Tsedu, who is Interim Chair of the Africa Editor's Forum and Editor of the Sunday Times, asserted that foreigners and Africans alike see the same Africa: children eating the cooked hearts of their victims in Liberia, failed democratic experiments, internecine civil strife and a parasitic elite wallowing in excess while their citizens die from infirmity and the effects of war.

"Are we responsible for that as editors?" Tsedu asked. "Yes and no. We are the people who make the decisions, but we are also not responsible," he said.

"We didn't start the wars in Liberia, DRC, Burundi or Sierra Leone. We did not create the permanent state of un-democrat-ness of Swaziland where the King is a law unto himself."

Tsedu then poked fun at traditional news values by saying he would love to get his hands on a story that retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu had bitten a dog, preferably on a Saturday afternoon, in time for his Sunday paper deadline!

"We should get out of this fantasy world and get into the real world," he said.

The big discussion point then became why should 'the African story' be reduced to the simplistic paradigm of "what is news?". Should African journalists continue to do the West a big favour by reinforcing all the prejudices they harbour about Africa?

Phil Molefe, head of TV channel SABC Africa, doesn't think so. Molefe is charged with using SABC's continent-wide reach to collect and disseminate all the African stories that are fresh and useful.

As the South African public broadcaster, the SABC has to work within the broader parameters set by a proactive South African government which is committed to engaging the rest of the continent, especially through newly created bodies like the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

"The West's view of Africa is that of a continent afflicted by famine, poverty, diseases and corruption," Molefe said. "Absolutely nothing to celebrate Africa's successes and rich history."

The SABC executive is convinced that part of the reason African stories are so dismal is because they are often not told by Africans.

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The untold 21st century story

By Tawana Kupe

The untold breaking story of our time is the digital revolution.

The information revolution is, in the words of the poet Yeats, "utterly, utterly changing".

Information is the central determinant of decision-making in all spheres of life including leisure, pleasure and intimate relationships.

It will change the way politics is conducted; economies work and how business operates. More importantly it is changing how media produce and disseminate information.

It is changing our understanding of who is the producer of information. Huge networks of private citizens are now producing information. And it is changing media-audience relationships.

Current traditional media gather information and disseminate it, but the interactivity of ICTs allow for:

- the manipulation and reproduction of information;
- the engagement with other producers;
- the engagement with audiences.

ICTs work in an increasingly horizontal, democratising way. There is no longer a monopoly on production by the traditional media. Dialogue is greatly expanded.

To quote Yeats again, the information revolution can also be a "terrible beauty". It has great potential for democracy and development, but if not harnessed properly could cause harm (here think of the way paedophiles use the power of the Internet to procure children for sex), and it demands a lot from media and reporting.

Journalists therefore need to reflect on their own reporting practices.

Guilty

The media in Africa are guilty of neglecting and mishandling the story of the African Information Society as part of the global Information Society. They have not reported on policy initiatives or on ICT issues in an informative and accessible way.

They have failed to report on Nepad's programmes of detailed policy initiatives and its comprehensive programmes for education and media.

Media provide one of the principle routes to public participation in policy making around ICTs and the media have not been saying what the content of that is, or how people should become part of the initiatives.

Why have they failed at this?

Nepad's ICT policy issues are not prioritised on news agendas. The priorities are the peer review mechanism and Robert Mugabe. Reporters seem not to have understood that Nepad is not a regime change mechanism for Zimbabwe!

There is lack of in-depth knowledge among journalists and editors about information technologies.

Most journalists in Africa have not learnt how to use ICTs.

Journalists report events and not processes. Development and democracy are processes and building an African Information Society is a process. Events are transitory. Not all processes can be reduced to events. This means that by not reporting the process of change to the Information Society journalists are not monitoring and cataloguing it, and are not infusing corrective action when it is needed.

Contextualised reporting would put Africa and ICTs into the debate on the global Information Society.

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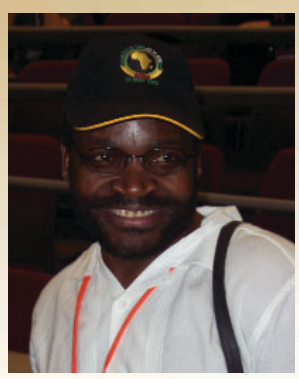
Phil Molefe

Mathatha Tsedu



Continued from page 17

He said: "The continued use in some sections of our media of foreign nationals as experts or commentators on matters affecting the continent entrenches the view that knowledge of scientific, economic and political developments is the exclusive preserve of [the West]."

Molefe cited the repeats of the clashes between the "Xhosa and the Zulu" in the early 1990s, the 1994 Rwanda genocide and "rampant" corruption as typical of the way Africa is covered by the powerful news agencies headquartered in Paris, New York and London.

"What is clearly lacking is context and the proper analysis of the situation," Molefe argued, adding that the clashes in South Africa were largely stirred by racists who did not want the 1994 elections to take place, the Rwandan genocide had its roots in Belgian and French colonial rule, while all the loot of the corrupt African leaders was kept in banks in Europe and North America.

While the news executives disagreed on what exactly 'the African story' is, they both agreed with media studies lecturer Prof Tawana Kupe, from the University of Witwatersrand, who said that it's time Africans told the great breaking story.

"The 'Information Revolution' is changing the world and life as we know it," Kupe said, and it's transforming politics, business, entertainment, education, and the way people communicate and relate to one another.

Kupe is convinced that the African media, obsessed as they are with the purist pursuit of the "Desmond Tutu-bite-dog"-type story, are "guilty of neglecting and mishandling the story of building an African Information Society as part of the Global Information Society".

"Specifically, they are guilty of neglecting reporting the policy initiatives that are necessary to make an African Information Society possible."

Kupe has been closely involved in discussions related to the communications initiatives that are laid out in the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The Nepad initiative is committed to implementing a three-part development plan that includes "bridging the digital divide by investing in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)".

Unfortunately, says Kupe, "despite the fact that of all Africa's development plans, Nepad is the only plan in which communication technology issues have been factored in", African media workers have been unwilling or unable to factor that into their news agendas.

So is it possible African media are afflicted with the same cynicism found in their Western equivalents, as Tsedu argues? Is it because Africans have not taken ownership of telling their stories, as Molefe says? Or is

Who is going to tell the stories?

Roland Stanbridge, Director of the MA in Global Journalism at Orebro University in Sweden, has just completed a research project into how African media is documenting the use of ICTs on the continent.

The study, "African Media and ICT4D: Documentary Evidence", was commissioned by the Economic Commission for Africa and covered Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal and is co-authored by research assistant Maria Ljunggren.

Stanbridge says: "We collected everything produced in these countries on ICTs. The most startling finding was that of all the material produced, 60% came from Egypt."

But what also emerged from the reportage of ICTs is that the stories are urban-focused, event-driven and lacking in debate and criticism.

The voice of ordinary people is almost totally missing, with presidents and CEOs being the visible speakers on information technology issues.

Generally editors of media organisations are quite ignorant on ICT matters (only one editor questioned in the entire study knew what the "African Information Society" was).

Training colleges around the continent are not adequately teaching the use of ICTs, either.

Stanbridge said: "Committed and knowledgeable journalists are very few. Who is going to tell the people of Africa the ICT story of Africa?"

"African Media and ICT4D: Documentary Evidence" is available from Mercy Wambui at mwambui@uneca.org

it possible that the African media might simply be out of depth when it comes to this brave new ICT world, as Kupe argues?

Roland Stanbridge of Stockholm University has just concluded a study for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) whose statistics are shocking, except that they should not be, coming as they do, from a continent that is dead last in almost every category of human endeavour.

Stanbridge's team monitored nine African countries on media coverage of the Internet over a two-month period earlier this year, and discovered that out of 1 000 stories, only one mentioned the WSIS, just two mentioned the phrase "ICT", and a solitary story quoted an average individual who was neither an expert, a bureaucrat or a politician and tried to see how that person was interacting with the Information Society.

Statistics don't lie, as the saying goes, so there is evidently a lot of work to be done to bring all the thinking around 'the African story' onto the same page.

There are certainly signs that some news executives are beginning to warm up to the challenge. Tsedu's Sunday Times used to have bureaux in London and New York, but has closed them to open up in Nairobi and Lagos. Similarly, SABC Africa has opened two bureaux in Harare and Nairobi, and has also signed information share agreements with national broadcasters in Rwanda and Egypt.

In East Africa, the Nation Media Group, with flagship titles, radio and television in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, recently launched a syndication service, and hopes to sell content to all takers around the continent.

These are baby steps still, but at least there are initiatives to have Africans tell the African story. The Nepad initiative shows that Africans could dream big, even on ICTs.

Now it's time to see whether there is a story in the details.

Reporting ICTs: the debate

By Theresa Swinton

ICT Focus Magazine in Ethiopia is raising awareness about the WSIS process and the implications of this summit for Ethiopia. This magazine offers news analysis, product and company profiles, feature articles and columns analysing the newest technology on the market.

In the iConnect Africa newsletter, the AISI 2003 Media Awards issued various media organisations and journalists for their coverage of the Information Society and ICT development issues in Africa is reported on.

Association Yampukri, an NGO based in Burkina Faso, produced a documentary programme detailing how ICTs are being integrated into communities. Yampukri has trained 900 people, established a computer library and has published five training books.

Réalités Multimédia based in Tunisia publishes a monthly online publication which covers a diverse range of ICT issues. This publication looks at the WSIS conferences, Tunisia's contribution to the process and the technical issues around online security. This publication has been functioning for the past 20 years.

But despite these shining examples, few African journalists are paying attention to Information Society issues in Africa. At the Highway Africa Conference this issue created intense debate.

Mohamed Timoulali, Regional Advisor to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) feels that media experts need to be implicated in, and create debate around, what kind of Information Society is needed in Africa.

"The problem that the African continent is facing is how to move into an Information Society when there is so much illiteracy. This is where the media needs to come in and create debate and understanding about ICTs," said Timoulali.

"It is important that in each country we have a vision and a debate which responds to the need of the citizens. What is missing is the analysis of ICT development."

Gracian Tukula, Deputy Editor of the Nation newspaper in Malawi, argues that many African journalists are not interested in ICTs and do not know what the Information Society is.

"Knowledge is fragmented, there is poor access to ICTs in newsrooms and no training programmes. We need to demystify the language around ICTs. If a journalist cannot understand the language, then the audience will not understand."

"ICTs have a crucial role to play in society but the environment and policy at company level is prohibitive. There are no clear ICT policies and limited ICT investment," said Tukula.

"Journalists should initiate a process of growth and understanding around these debates and media agencies should make a concerted effort to dedicate space to these stories. There is a lack of awareness about consumer rights, and it is the journalists' duty to report on the consumer concerns," said Timoulali.

In May 1995, the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) action plan was sent out calling for the development of National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans in every African country.

The aim is to base this plan in national developmental priorities such as health, education, employment creation, food security, land reclamation, water, debt management, industrial development, trade and tourism; to encourage regional co-operation between African countries and support regional development in the context of ICTs.

The three-phase plan focuses specifically on physical infrastructure of communication – improving interconnectivity in a region and the provision of gateways to international telecommunication networks; creation of a legislative and regulatory framework; the development of national information resources; ICT applications in key social and economic areas; links to national, regional and global development goals; and the development of human resources. At present 32 African countries are about to adopt the plan.

"Journalists are better placed to pass the message of ICTs to the community, especially the rural community," said Timoulali. "We must take this opportunity to do the necessary work, provide the necessary training and report what is being done and the successes and failures along the way."

Ultimately the viability of reporting on ICT development and analysing its impact on the African continent is conditional on government and media organisation's policies. Without adequate training or access to ICTs, it is difficult for journalists to report on the newest technologies. However, as the above cases show there is a need for this analysis and a need to create debate.

"There have been many failures in ICTs in Africa, but the journalists need to report on these failures as well. Only in this way can Africa move into the Information Society," said Timoulali.

Pipes & poles & people

Tina James

Ahmed El-Gody

By Sim Kyazze

Tina James, a South African ICT consultant, tells the story of Minnie Barendse Kruger who had been struggling to get a Khoisan Cultural Village going in the Eastern Cape. Kruger set up a restaurant where traditional food is prepared, and the Barendse Griquas Trust stepped in and helped set up a multi-purpose Community Centre.

The centre hired ICT experts to design a website for the Khoisan Cultural Village with Eastern Cape youth. The website focus is the cultural heritage of the Barendse Griquas, collecting support information for craft manufacturing (especially of ceramics), and becoming a one-stop shopping centre for prospective visitors and buyers of the KhoiSan artefacts.

It has also embarked on collecting information to prepare an electronic record of KhoiSan art and crafts, craft manufacturers in the area, know-how information for manufacturing, information on indigenous food and simple promotional information about the area.

James said she was telling the story to delegates at the Highway Africa conference because no one seemed to know about it.

"Write about it," James said. "Flood the continent with the little stories and create connections."

James was particularly disappointed that the

efforts to use information technology to change people's lives in remote areas of the African continent, were not being reported.

"We should tell these stories, even if they are few. Even if they are not very good," James said.

James and others like her who track information policy debates, argue that stories like these cannot be seen in isolation, but in an entire context – a context which James calls "pipes, poles and people".

"ICTs in isolation (the pipes and poles) will achieve little in communities (the people)," James said, if the whole is not functional. If there are no telephones, James said, there is no communication; if there is no communication; there is no Internet access; if there is no Internet access; there is no online promotion; and if there is no obvious need for online promotion from the community, then everything would be in vain.

"So you have to look at a universal access policy," James said, "focus on possible ICT applications to integrate and synergise sectoral and ICT policies and ensure that funding allows policy implementation."

All this requires political will, which can only be generated if there is passion and enthusiasm at the grassroots and educating of the people about ICTs.

While much of Africa suffers from lack of coherent government policy on ICTs, Egypt seems to have no such problems, according to Ahmed El-Gody of the Modern Sciences and Arts University.

"Government wants to be part of [the Internet]," El-Gody said. There is a ministry in charge of Information Technology in Egypt, and the government wants to encourage any and all 'e-s'; e-business, e-revenue, e-learning, e-travel, e-and so on."

The country has propelled its e-readiness along with some audacious moves over the last few years. Telephone penetration is up to 47% today, after the government cut tariffs, privatised some of the telecommunications providers and set minimal installation fees. What is more, in Egypt, the Internet is a free plug-and-play affair, as long as you have a telephone, and as a result, the country has over 2.2-million users and growing very fast.

What is amazing about the Egyptian situation is that while ordinary people are excited about the Internet and what it can do in their lives, the media is very suspicious of the Internet and ICTs as a whole and as such, telling the information policy story in the country has been a dismal failure.

El-Gody said that it took Egyptian newspapers seven years to get onto the Internet and even today, only 17% are on the Internet, with many executives suspicious that ICTs are equivalent to westernisation.

"Journalists write on things that they don't actually believe in," El-Gody said of this love-hate relationship. "They don't think that the Internet can help them." But they write about it occasionally because the government is very enthusiastic.

Somewhere between Tina James' despair about the untold info policy story in South Africa, and Ahmed El-Gody's tale of the double-sided reportage of the same in Egypt, is the actual African info policy story.

The story that has to be told along the entire assembly line: from the community to the policy level. And there is no one to tell this story but the media.

For example, radio being what it is across the continent (currently the fastest growing medium), can give a huge boost to the story if it's told seriously.

Experts have argued that the basic problem with most IT shows and articles in Africa is that they are arcane and industry-centred, and are not people-centred. Indeed, a recent study carried out in nine countries for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) found just one story in 1 000 stories studied on ICTs had mentioned an ordinary African citizen!

As James said, "if you are going to tell your [info policy] stories, you will have to add the 'So What?' to the 5Ws."

Too fast too furious

By Theresa Swinton

In less than 10 years, rapid advances in information and communication technologies have enabled journalists to send their stories from anywhere in the world ahead of the competition. Speed journalism means transmitting 90-second to two-minute footage as quickly as possible after it has been filmed, using digital equipment which has become increasingly smaller and more compact.

For freelance journalist and former producer for Associated Press TV, Sahm Venter, the war coverage of Iraq is a prime example of the way that television journalism will be mapped out in the future. In the 1991 Gulf War, television footage was revolutionised by the introduction of the satellite phone for live audio. The 2003 Iraq war introduced the Swe-DISH, a $200 000 satellite news gathering unit which folds up into a bag the size of aeroplane hand luggage and can be set up in three and a half minutes. A camera and microphone is plugged into this system, enabling journalists to edit footage and transmit audio and video.

"The future of television journalism is live, with no thought for policies around ethics and quality. Television news is becoming a voyeuristic operation for audiences," said Venter. But how does this form of journalism impact on Africa and the African contribution to the global media market?

"When the SABC discussed covering the war in Iraq we wanted to assure the audience that they could access many views from a variety of sources," said head of TV Jimi Matthews. "The international agencies gave a sanitised version of the war. The SABC went into Afghanistan months before the invasion and reported the human stories. We wanted to make the audience realise that the 'collateral damage' that the other stations were referring to, were women and children, people."

This time, the SABC felt that it would be problematic to rely solely on CNN or BBC, especially with their use of embedded journalists.

"Independence was sacrificed. Everything which was transmitted had to be vetted by the army unit that the journalists were embedded with," said Matthews.

The reliance of television agencies on ICTs to transmit live footage is resulting in Africa being left behind in the global media.

In a study conducted by Glasgow University's Media Group, it was found that Africa was the least covered continent in the year 2000 with only a small percentage of stories despite the fact that millions of people had died in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that year. The greatest amount of coverage given by media organisations was to stories which were located within the country the journalists were situated in.

"African journalists who work for international agencies have to get permission to do certain stories, and if a bigger story comes up then the African story is thrown out," said Venter.

African journalists working for international agencies do not receive the same standard of ICT equipment or training, and when they do receive equipment it is 'loaned' to them.

Television journalism in Africa relies almost exclusively on news footage produced and distributed by Reuters Television (RTV) and Associated Press Television News (APTN). The competitive environment in which these agencies operate translates the news into a commodity not a public service. As a commodity, policies of ethics and content quality have been passed over and with the increasing development of ICTs, there is little attempt by television agency managements to develop guidelines around their use.

"The quality of television journalism is deteriorating and it is up to the owners to ensure that proper journalistic practices are adhered to. At the moment they are not doing this," said Matthews. "The audience also has a responsibility though. If the audience criticised the poor quality of content, then perhaps media agencies would have to rethink their strategy."

"With the emphasis being placed on speed rather then quality, the agencies are ignoring ethics and are letting market relations rule. Reliability, accuracy, balance, fairness, integrity and independence are being ignored because television news is market and competition driven," said Venter.

New strategies old medium

Patricia Litho (left) and Atieno Aluoch

By Theresa Swinton

Cheaper than most other media and able to cross language and literacy barriers, radio is still the best medium for transferring information across media and developing and educating rural communities.

"Radio's efficiency is proven and well documented. Its accessibility is unquestionable and the remotest of areas can have access to radio," says Patricia Litho from the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA).

"Marginalised communities can and do access radio even when they do not own sets, and essentially these communities rely on radio for health and political information."

Because of the impact and accessibility of radio, various organisations promoting new technologies have found it necessary to integrate radio and ICTs, and projects and telecentres have been established in an attempt to improve access to information and education.

The DTR (Development Through Radio) project is an established project in Sierra Leone which uses radio to reach marginalised female communities. It has been set up in conjunction with Stanford University and Reuters Digital Vision 2000.

DTR has established 30 community-based radio clubs which meet weekly. These clubs have a membership of between 10 and 80 women and children, varying across the age spectrum. The aim of these groups is to discuss issues which are relevant to their own communities, record the discussions and then broadcast them on Sierra Leone Broadcasting Station, the national radio station.

"Radio is the best form of communication in Africa. It is cheaper and communities do not need to be literate in order to feel the impact of the message," says Mercy Wambui, Communications Officer for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). "It enables these communities to resolve their isolation as they have no other access to information and no stable infrastructure."

The Universal Service Agency (USA) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC) have set up numerous telecentres across Africa which incorporate new technologies and radio. The USA provides access to ICT services through three types of telecentres: standard telecentres, telecentres in school cyberlabs and telecentres in multipurpose community centres. These centres have been established as tools to enable communities to establish and improve an ICT infrastructure of e-health, e-education, e-business development and e-government.

In South Africa 73 community telecentres and 30 schools cyberlabs have been set up in underserved areas. Out of these 73 community telecentres, 48 are functional with a 65% success rate.

In Uganda, telecentres in Nakaseke, Nabweru and Buwama have been established and funded by Unesco and the IDRC. These telecentres are integrating new

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"Radio is the best form of communication in Africa. It is cheaper and communities do not need to be literate in order to feel the impact of the message."

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technology with components of community radio. Radio Apac and Radio Kagadi are at present establishing telecentre components to their stations.

Before opening a telecentre, various criteria need to be considered by the USA and IDRC; the needs of a community, long-term prospects for economic sustainability and the location of the telecentre.

Once the telecentres have been established and have various community groups which have a financial stake in the telecentre's operation, the USA monitors the successes and failures of the centres which can be incorporated into future development.

"Radio is looked at as a point of authority, and many times you hear people from rural communities say 'it was even said on radio', so to them radio is authentic and can be relied on for proper information," says Litho. "It is central in community development, and success stories on fighting epidemics and accomplishing political campaigns can be attributed to radio."

In the DTR project in Sierra Leone, the radio clubs record their discussions in Krio, the national language, and the recordings are edited down to 22-minute slots. "Their experiences are unique and the concept of this project is to let the women tell their own stories and discuss their own experiences. We are using new technology in a reverse cycle of journalism. The women and children speak about their own experiences. Journalists do not come into the communities and interpret for them," says Wambui.

Although DTR is a community-based initiative, it has an audience which is broader than its own geographic area, and reaches other communities in Sierra Leone and West African countries along its boarders. In the same way telecentres are giving information access to the communities in which they are situated and to a larger audience, specifically friends and relatives of those living in the community.

The telecentres are both a means of communicating with family and friends as well as an educational and developmental tool. The ultimate aim of these centres is to give and improve the skills, information and links that the community needs to develop a sustainable infrastructure.

"The context of these projects is the absence of media ownership for marginalised groups, so in order to reach these communities a partnership has to be set up between communities and the existing media," says Wambui.

"These communities now have access to policy makers and through this simple and rudimentary education these communities are developing skills which will enable them to live in a sustainable way in the future," says Wambui.

A manual for community radio news

NewsFlash, an independent news agency servicing radio stations, has decided to put to paper the advice they've been giving out over the years through their training programmes. Henning Coetzee, NewsFlash editor, with support from Sanlam, the company that runs community media awards every year in South Africa, has authored a practical guide for compiling news reports for community radio stations. The guide ranges from the very practical components of finding news and reporting it through to the bigger ethical issues and controversies. For further information contact Coetzee on editor@newsflash.co.za or call 27-21-4221212.

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Traditional bearers

By Juliet Were Oguttu

The struggle for women's empowerment worldwide is an outcome of the patriarchal set-up of society that has for a very long time denied women access to information, communication and full realisation of their rights and potential.

For African women in particular, patriarchal social structures have left women in isolation and the major communication role that has been bestowed upon them has been to ensure that the traditional and cultural norms are passed on from one generation to another as a way of upholding the values of society.

Unfortunately, many of the traditions which are strongly valued (eg: female genital mutilation, bride price and preference of the boy child) have a direct effect on women's sexual and reproductive health and have also contributed to their marginalisation.

And, since the 1950s when a good number of African countries attained independence from different colonial regimes, the continent has experienced many civil conflicts and wars. According to the Economic Commission for Africa's African Women's Report (1998) more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa since the 1970s.

By 1996, out of the 53 African countries, 14 had experienced armed conflicts contributing to more than one half of all war-related deaths globally. Even in countries free of armed conflict, patriarchal governance, weak law enforcement structures, military regimes and dictatorship nurture high incidences of gender violence and gross abuses of human rights.

When one analyses the root causes of such conflicts, the underlying problem is failure to dialogue, poor consultation and intolerance of one another. All these are communication problems that perpetuate under-development.

However, even in situations of armed conflict, warring factions are aware of the potential of ICTs in enhancing the struggle. Rebel commanders usually have powerful communications equipment that they use to track the activities of the counter warring group and for sending out messages to instil fear among civilians and governments.

On the other side, governments try to control the flow of information about such conflicts to civilians.

Currently in Uganda, with the influx of the Lord's Resistance Army into parts of Teso (eastern Uganda), radio station Radio Veritas was closed down for informing the masses about the advancing rebels and the need for civilians to move to safer areas. According to authorities, the radio station was purportedly revealing government military plans and therefore making its work difficult. Under such circumstances, where access to information is denied, women and children are left trapped in conflict-stricken areas and thus are exposed to various gender-based violations.

Strategies for conflict areas

Isis-WICCE was established in 1974 in Geneva, Switzerland, with the aim of strengthening communicative mechanisms among women's organisations

# of information

worldwide, to share information, ideas and experiences in order to improve their status and overcome gender inequality.

As global needs for information and knowledge about women continued to grow, Isis-WICCE relocated to Uganda in 1993 with the objective of tapping the voices of African women and integrating them into the global women's knowledge base.

The organisation has since focused on women's human rights in situations of armed conflict and has used different communication strategies to make the voices and concerns of women in conflict visible.

Documenting women's stories

Isis-WICCE has since 1997 documented women's realities in situations of armed conflict in Uganda and the findings reveal high rates of psychological trauma, pathetic sexual and reproductive health and general ill-health and apathy among women war survivors.

All these are a result of the various atrocities inflicted upon women which include being gang raped, seeing their children being raped, being forced to have sex with relatives, watching their loved ones being killed, maiming and burning, among others.

Given the culture of silence around women's sexual and reproductive health, the majority of women continue to live with pain throughout their lifetimes. Most of the women who shared their experiences had not before had an opportunity to talk.

The process of speaking out and sharing their experiences was the beginning of a healing process for the women, accompanied by an urge to access information on how their lives could be improved. The outcomes of this documentation process can be found at http://www.isis.org.ug.

Capacity building

Isis-WICCE runs skills-building workshops for women leaders from different parts of Uganda who have experienced armed conflict, to equip them with skills of analysing conflicts, peace building, communication and leadership.

As part of their involvement in their communities, the women carry out sensitisation seminars in local languages and use music and drama as communication mediums. This has enabled a wider community to access information and the creation of own content.

Rural info units

During the documentation process, one of the major problems identified was the lack of a central place where women leaders in post-conflict communities could access information. Isis-WICCE set up three rural information units to serve as meeting places for women leaders to talk about issues that affect their lives and exchange information. The units are equipped with tape recorders that are used for recording the best practices as well as for recording gender-based violations against women and children for advocacy and redress purposes.

Video documentaries

Due to high rates of illiteracy among Ugandan women and a sustaining oral-based culture, video is an effective form of communication. It also enables women to access information that they are normally denied. Isis-WICCE has developed two video documentaries, "Women, War and Trauma" and "A Lingering Pain" as tools for sensitising communities in Uganda, Africa and the rest of the world, on the ills of war and the need to put in place mechanisms for appropriate redress for women war survivors as well as involving them in the peace-building processes.

Women's Internet café

A women's Internet café was set up in 2000 to give women and girls a supportive environment for interfacing with ICTs. The café is used for training women and girls as well as enabling them have access to different Internet applications.

Women and girls who have benefited from this initiative have built confidence in the use of ICTs and attained hands-on skills that have enabled them to interact with their peers worldwide. Some of them have gained employment through skills gained, and some women's groups have been able to access and disseminate information for empowerment, and in seeking redress.

Interventions needed

The challenges faced in promoting women's use of ICTs in conflict-affected areas are numerous and require commitment on the part of governments, private sector, civil society and all other interested key actors.

The World Summit on the Information Society is an appropriate forum that should ensure that the following interventions are put in place and fulfilled:

- Information and communication policies must be gender sensitive, inclusive, and must reflect the needs of the majority of African women.
- Liberalisation and privatisation policies must include regulations that protect and empower the majority, especially marginalised groups such as women.
- Women and girls should be provided with opportunities in their localities to learn and use ICTs for their empowerment.
- Governments should speed up efforts to eliminate the social and cultural pressures that have continued to keep women and girls out of the public arena.
- Women ICT practitioners should be supported to develop concepts, theories and analysis geared towards developing relevant content for African women's information needs.
- Women in conflict situations must be urgently provided with efficient and effective communication systems to be able to access needed support in time.

> "The major communication role that has been bestowed upon African women has been to ensure that the traditional and cultural norms are passed on from one generation to another as a way of upholding the values of society."

Juliet Were Oguttu works for ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS-WICCE) in Uganda with responsibility for ICT advocacy. wjuliet@isis.org.ug

Photograph: Jon Riordan

Take women and radio: add new media

Mercy Wambui was awarded a Digital Vision Fellowship by the Reuters Foundation to spend time at Stanford University proto-typing the use of ICTs in a developing country. Wambui chose to work with the development Through Radio (DTR) project, a concept that gives women's groups a national voice in Sierra Leone's post-war reconstruction.

Traditionally, radio broadcasting has functioned as the machinery of African government propaganda to citizens. This top-down approach came under heavy challenge during the wave of calls for democracy in the 90s. Discussions on media reform, liberalisation of the airwaves and deregulation of telecoms fuelled civil society interest in media for development.

In East Africa for instance, community media projects begun to mushroom in the mid- to late-90s, largely due to efforts supported by Amarc and the Community Media Network of Eastern and Southern Africa. Communities began to set up radio stations and determine the broadcast content based on development priorities agreed upon through participatory processes.

Yet, while community radio stations generally meet the communication needs of most communities, the audience typically remains those living in the radio station's vicinity. DTR on the other hand is a community-based initiative that seeks a much broader audience.

In the absence of media ownership, the DTR

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How to make a digital diva

By Amanda Singleton

It is difficult to get reliable statistics on women's ICT usage, especially of the Internet, in developing countries.

Standard indicators are not disaggregated by sex, and available data is not very reliable or comparable. However, it is quite clear that numbers are small and distribution limited.

Most women Internet users in developing countries are not representative of women in the country as a whole, but rather part of a small, educated urban elite. Also, most use it at work as a production tool and not as a tool of communication to create and exchange information.

Despite the emphasis of policy makers on getting women connected, the issues of access and control go beyond connectivity.

A series of factors, including literacy and education, language, time, cost, content, geographical location of facilities, social and cultural norms, and women's computer and information search and dissemination skills, constrain women's access to information technology. In some cultures women are not permitted to have face-to-face contact with men, or are expected to stay at home, or are isolated in restricted living facilities.

It is obvious how ICT will empower women living in such cultures. Distance education and e-commerce will be significant. Secondly, technology itself is socially constructed, and ICTs are viewed in a gender-specific context much as a physician is often culturally construed as masculine and a nurse as feminine.

Women today are still often socialised towards non-technical careers, and in technical careers which demand a high level of ICT skills, pay inequality often exists.

Inequitable allocation of education and training resources often favours boys and men. For governments with the political will to develop and implement national programmes of educational gender equity, ICTs can be invaluable.

ICTs will always be a bridge too far if the issue is as basic as not having electricity in the home. If the question of poverty is not resolved, women's empowerment in the digital age will never happen. Women who are low-income or living in poverty have a desperate need for information and contacts that can assist and support their efforts to build their way out of poverty. Web sites, email and electronic bulletins facilitate knowledge-sharing and make it possible for women to be in contact. Even a simple telephone can make a major difference.

Digital empowerment is the responsibility of the private sector and forward-thinking governments. Extension of infrastructure such as wireless and satellite is crucial. Emphasis needs to be placed on common facilities, such as telecentres, phone shops and other forms of public access. Women need to be ensured easy, safe and affordable access to ICTs. Efforts must be made to increase the number of girls and women studying IT-related subjects. In terms of policy formulation, women advocates and activists need to be involved whenever global, regional and national policy formulation is taking place. The basic premise of the gender digital divide is marginalisation of women. Lack of access to ICTs is a microcosm of existing gender relations in society.

Much work in the area of gender sensitisation is needed to raise awareness of the power structures that are rooted in culture and the economic system that dominate the world today. The African Information Society Initiative seeks to ensure that by the year 2010, "every man and woman, school child, village, government office and business in Africa can access information and knowledge resources through computers and telecommunications". At the same time, Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (an ambitious agenda for reducing poverty and improving lives) is to "promote gender equality and empower women". The revolution of the future is about knowledge. How can women, and all they have to offer, be excluded from this?

Amanda Singleton is Group Executive of Corporate Communication for South Africa's Telkom

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jennifer Sibanda, of FAMW-Zimbabwe has been quoted as saying that DTR training programmes encourage women to become agents of change, and equip them with skills to help alleviate poverty, as well as to address issues such as the marginalisation of and discrimination against women.

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

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

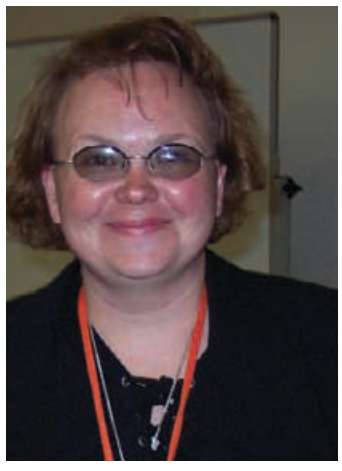
DTR in Sierra Leone

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

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

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

The unbalanced media diet



Pauliina Shilongo

Pat Made

By Anthea Garman

When you look at the Southern African "media diet" served up for Africans to consume, you discover some curious things about the differential reporting on men and women.

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

The resulting study is called the Gender Media Baseline Study and can be accessed online at www.genderlinks.org.za

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

"We looked at the entire media diet," said Made.

The intention was to build a team across the region with the skills to undertake media monitoring and to compile enough material to use as a gender-awareness and advocacy tool.

What were the findings?

- Of sources used, 83% were male, 17% female, with prominence given to men in authority. "There is a strong parallel here to the global study done in the year 2000 in 71 countries," Made said.
- When women do appear they tend to be in the age group 25 to 40 and then they become "virtually invisible… before 24 they have no voice and after 50 they have no voice", Made said.
- Women carry their "private identity" more than men, in other words women are identified as mothers and wives more often in public than men. The statistics are 11% of women and 2% of men identified in this way in the reports covered.
- Who speaks on what issues? Men overwhelmingly speak for all humans even when gender violence becomes an issue. Only on the issue of gender equality do women get to represent themselves more often than men.
- How do female parliamentarians fare? Although 18% of members of parliament in the region are women (31% in SA) they get quoted only 8% of the time.

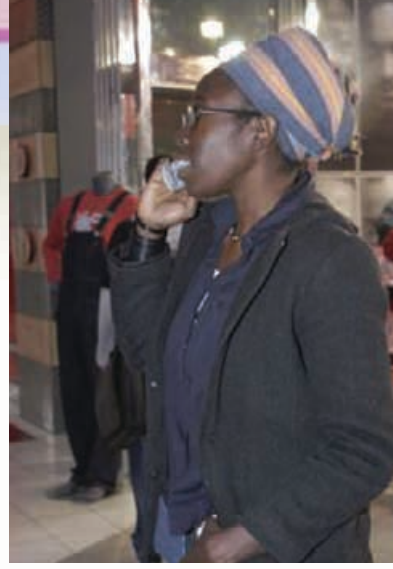
Other findings according to Shilongo are that:

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

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

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

See www.genderlinks.org.za for a wealth of further information and training materials which deal with the multiple facets of gendered reporting in Africa.



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

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

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

Add new media

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

The focus of the Reuters Digital Vision Fellowship was to explore the potential for new technologies in expanding the notion of DTR to a wider audience. If the voices of rural women can be put on a national policy-making table, can new technologies provide a channel beyond the borders for a global audience? Can content generated by women in the provinces of Sierra Leone be shared with other global communities? Consultations with the Forum of Conscience led to a visit in December 2002 to carry out a needs assessment.

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

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

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

At the time of the visit, Internet access for the majority was through private cyber cafés in Freetown. There was only one Internet service provider, Sierratel. The speed was generally excruciatingly slow, expensive and therefore prohibitive to the majority of interested users. Frequent power outages made computer use prohibitive as well. FOC has computers in all its offices, but has no Internet access and experiences frequent power outages.

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

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

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

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

A new public sphere?

By Herman Wasserman and Arrie de Beer

It is widely accepted that a healthy public sphere is a necessity for democracy, and that the media can facilitate debate in this sphere. In the years since democratisation in South Africa, the media's freedom to fulfil this role has been jealously guarded.

The constitutional guarantee of free speech has given the media a defence to engage in the democratic processes by sniffing out corruption, pointing out shortcomings in government policy and holding politicians and other public figures accountable.

Not everyone agrees that the South African media's approach has always been the correct one under the circumstances, but that it has a vital role to play in the democratic process, is not disputed.

This is certainly true of the traditional news media, where several hard-hitting stories have shown the media's commitment to democrac and where the exchange of diverse viewpoints has also confirmed the media's role as a forum for dialogue and debate.

But what about the new media of the Internet, email and related communication technologies? Worldwide the Internet has been enthusiastically welcomed as a way of broadening democratic processes and strengthening civil society.

The interactive nature of the Internet has prompted some critics to envisage this medium as the new embodiment of the public sphere, where opinions can be exchanged more freely than in traditional media. Then there is the phenomenon of cyber activism, through which the Internet and related communication technologies have brought a new dimension to political mobilisation.

The question is, however, whether this potential also applies to African countries, and more specifically, to Africa south of the Sahara.

And, if the Internet can be applied in South African democratic processes, what will the changes that it brings about look like? Will they be revolutionary, or hardly noticeable at all? And what will it say about the application of the Internet for similar purposes in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa? Is there reason for excitement or mild optimism?

Is the glass half full or half empty?

Depending on whom you talk to, or on which highway you find yourself, the future of the Internet in South Africa is either very bleak or extremely rosy. Some critics hail it as a technology that will enable African countries to "leapfrog" stages in the development of communication infrastructure, others say the disproportionate advantages it gives developed countries will

only lead to a widening of the gulf between rich and poor nations. One is often tempted to quote statistics reminding us that Manhattan has more telephone lines than sub-Saharan Africa, that only one out of every 250 to 400 people in Africa has access to the Internet compared to the one out of every two people in Europe and North America, or that the latest census figures have shown that only 2% of black households in South Africa have a computer compared with 46% of white households.

The potential benefits of the Internet for democracy in Africa, ranging from elections, input on policy matters and protest against certain policies, should be considered seriously.

The interactive nature of the medium makes it suited for the exchange of information in a participatory manner. It is therefore potentially ideal for encouraging democratic practices.

How should one think about the role of the Internet in political processes without seeing it in deterministic ways, as if the introduction of a new technology would necessarily be the sole cause of the revolutionisation of political functions?

Overly optimistic proposals of the Internet's role in political life are often flawed because they tend to see the development of new technologies as to some extent separate or isolated from other societal and institutional processes that surround it.

This has been pointed out by the American Internet scholar Philip Agre, who suggested an "amplification model", in which the Internet is not so much a force creating new political effects, but a part of a social network in which existing institutional forces are amplified. From this perspective, the Internet may facilitate change only inasmuch as the political and social institutions of which it forms part and through which it is appropriated have already planned or willed this change.

In other words, if one wants to ask the question as to what potential effects the Internet might have for democracy in (South) Africa, one should first try and find out what the salient forces in the (South) African political arena are that might be magnified through an introduction of the Internet into these democratic processes.

These might for instance include the newly formed African Union (AU), the initiatives around the New Partnership for African Development (Nepad) and the critical responses to this plan, and the continued growth of a vibrant civil society in South Africa.

Of course the detrimental forces will also have to be reckoned with. These include the material factors hampering the development of the Internet in Africa, and the stark inequalities (across racial, gender and class lines) in both connectivity and "real" access, which would include the skills needed to utilise the technology optimally.

However grim the issue of connectivity might seem in the African context, some success has already been attained in South Africa. In the field of formal democratic processes such as voting procedures and the dissemination of government information, as well as the organisation and mobilisation of interest groups making use of their democratic freedom of association and freedom of speech, the Internet has proved useful.

Although the spread of connectivity in South Africa is far from equitable, it has started to amplify political and societal forces in a recognisable way on both governmental and non-governmental level.

The government has appropriated this medium to extend its vision of citizen participation in the democratic processes and to disseminate information among at least a section of the electorate. However, access to information alone is not enough for citizens to become involved in influencing the policy-making process.

In the last few years social movements and activist groups have harnessed the Internet to give them a more direct say in policy. Examples of this "top-down" and "bottom-up" involvement in democratic processes via the Internet and email, are the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

With the forthcoming South African general elections in 2004, the challenge of voter education, access to political information and citizen participation in the voting process will again come under the spotlight.

During these debates it will again be necessary to scrutinise the successes that the IEC has already achieved through its Internet presence, and the obstacles in the way of a viable e-government. The elections will also be an opportunity to interrogate the progress that was made during the last 10 years of democracy.

These questions have increasingly come from civil society movements like the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless Peoples' Movement and the Treatment Action Campaign. A recent answer to such pressure came in the form of a government decision to change its policy on the provision of anti-retrovirals in the public health sector. This policy change has come about because of immense pressure brought to bear on government by groups such as the TAC, through its relentless media campaigns.

Not only traditional media – where TAC has mostly received favourable coverage – but also the Internet and email was used to enforce policy changes by putting the provision of HIV/Aids drugs on the public agenda.

The IEC (www.elections.org.za) uses the Internet with a high degree of efficiency during election times to make relevant information available that affects voters (eg: whether one's name is on the voter's roll; where voting stations are; which parties participate in the elections). During election times special mobile units are positioned in otherwise inaccessible rural areas, spreading relevant election information from where it is taken further by word of mouth and radio.

The site also provides the voter with several other databases as to how many seats a political party won on local, provincial and national level, and how many votes were registered during elections at each level. This correlates with the notion that any democracy, and its electoral components, should be transparent and accessible.

The TAC (www.tac.org.za) also uses the Internet and email to further its aims. Although one of the TAC's strategies is to "maintain TAC visibility through posters, pamphlets, meetings, street activism and letter writing" and therefore seems to rely on more traditional media, some of its other objectives are well suited for pursuit through the Internet. Its aims, as stated on its website, include to "build a mass TAC membership" and "build networks and alliances with unions, employers, religious bodies, women and youth organisations, lesbian and gay organisations and other interested sections of the community".

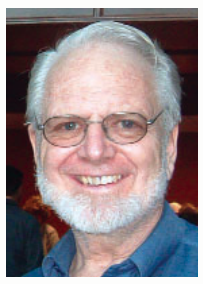
These attempts may be amplified by this medium's capability to distribute information quickly across a wide database, to bridge (geo)spatial distances and to build solidarity networks through cross-linking. The Internet and email might also provide a valuable tool to mobilise supporters for civil disobedience actions, such as have taken place earlier in 2003. Statistics show a rise in website visits over these periods.

> "Depending on whom you talk to, or on which highway you find yourself, the **future** of the Internet is either **very bleak** or **extremely rosy**."

While there seems to be reason to be optimistic about the potential new media technologies have for citizen participation ranging from formal electoral procedures to mobilisation and debate, deterministic views should be avoided.

Although the Internet in Africa is confronted by socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural impediments, some of the positive social forces for democratic participation are already showing some measure of success.

The glass might just be half-full.



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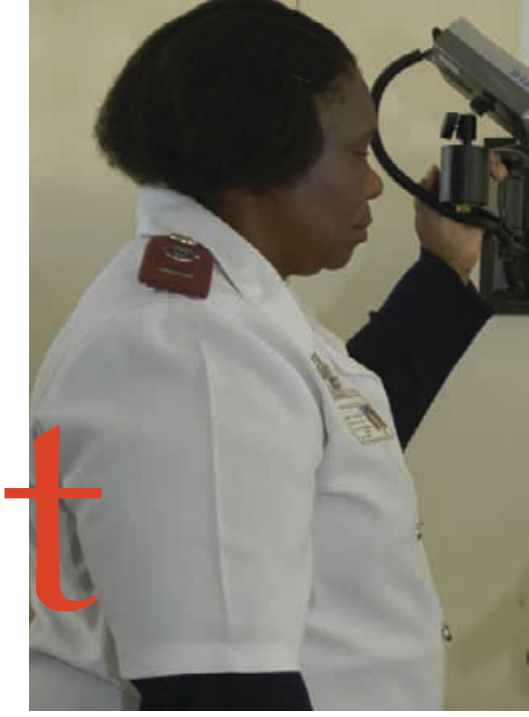
Development by default



Countries that don't take up the challenges posed by global technological trends are increasingly marginalised, not only from the global network economy, but also in their ability to deliver on their own developmental objectives.

By Alison Gillwald

Research in information and communication technologies and development in Africa is limited, fragmented and typically undertaken as isolated and disconnected projects.

Most of the understanding of the information age comes from the theory and experiences gained in the developed world. Africa produces little in the way of independent, primary research feeding into ICT policy and regulatory processes.

Unlike other parts of the world committed to participatory policy formulation processes, there are few independent local agencies contributing to public policy processes in the broader public interest.

Strengthening African institutional capacity for research, analysis and debate in developing countries is an indispensable element in the construction of knowledge societies.

In the absence of innovative organic policies, international models become the default development strategies for developing countries, with serious consequences.

Though it has been argued that trying to reform African national policies is futile or will take too long without the development of informed, integrated and appropriate national policies, the role that ICT can play in development will be limited.

This is evident in the initiatives that have deployed ICTs to alleviate poverty to date. In most cases these have been small-scale projects or pilots that are often not scalable or sustainable and have often only been made possible by donor intervention. The outcomes of these endeavours tend to be localised and at best can only be ameliorative.

While the connecting of a project or institution that would not have been connected otherwise must be viewed as a positive development, such initiatives need to acknowledge that they are dealing with symptoms rather than causes.

Where such projects are conducted within the context of broader efforts to deal with the more fundamental determinants of circumstances, such as restrictive policy, they are more likely to produce positive developmental outcomes in the longer term.

National and multilateral projects, on the other hand, have been preoccupied with large-scale infrastructure expansion, with little consideration for what will happen at the end of the line, and have generally not been integrated into broader developmental polices. The arising argument however, that access isn't useful without applications and content, while of course correct, can just as easily be turned around. Applications and content aren't very useful without access either.

It is for this reason that the central public policy challenge facing African decision-makers, responsible for ICT, remains ensuring affordable access to services.

This has to be achieved, however, while creating the conditions for the development of the information infrastructure – which includes the seamless integration of networks, services and content – needed to operate a modern economy and participate effectively in global developments.

While there may well be tensions between these objectives at various points in the development of a modern ICT sector, they should not be viewed as contradictory. Without an integrated strategy to achieve both developmental and growth objectives, neither will be achieved.

Countries that are unable to take up the challenges posed by global technological and economic trends are increasingly marginalised, not only from the global network economy, but also in their ability to deliver on their own developmental objectives.

International reform agenda

It was an awareness of this new reality that drove the telecommunications reform process that has swept the globe over the last three decades. Reform mechanisms of privatisation, competition, and independent regulation, often only assessed in research-resourced OECD countries, have been hailed as having resulted in price decreases, improvement in service quality, faster roll-out of infrastructure and new technology, and more choice for consumers.

On this basis telecom reform has been sold to African countries as a mechanism to transform their debilitated communication infrastructures and integrate their countries into the global economy.

The first phases of telecom reform in Africa have had far more mixed outcomes, however, and in some cases have had a negative impact both on affordable access and sector development.

The reform model that emerged for developing countries from multilateral agencies consisted of three integrated components. These included the usually partial privatisation of the incumbent fixed line operator through the extension of the monopoly; the introduction of network competition in the mobile segment of the market and service-based competition in the value-added network services (VANS) and Internet service provider (ISP) market; and finally the establishment of a sector regulator to implement policy.

In practice the reform agenda prioritised privatisation which was perceived as the mechanism that would most rapidly redress the dismal outcomes of grossly inefficient state provision of telecommunications services which had left Africa at the start of the reform process in the 90s with a continental teledensity of around 1%. This meant the critical role of introducing competition, into what are perceived as the elite components of the market, was often sidelined.

More importantly, while inducing the opening up of markets to foreign trade and investment, insufficient emphasis has been placed on the need for strong institutional arrangements to deal effectively either with the regulation of the private monopoly in a partially competitive market and to counter market failure likely to arise in such imperfect markets. This has probably been the most undermining factor of reform efforts in developing countries.

Privatisation, without the regulatory capacity or political will to manage a private monopoly or the competitive framework, can be entirely counterproductive to the achievement of the very goals intended by liberalisation.

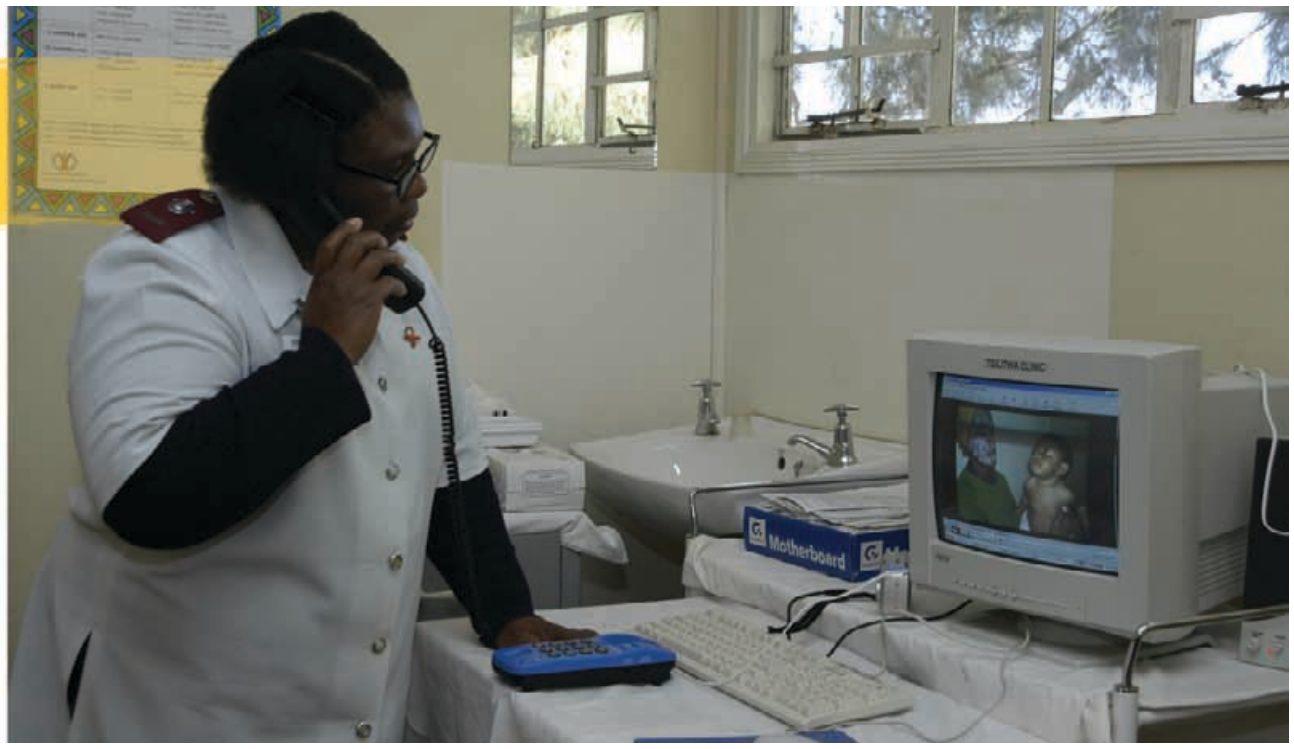
Privatisation

Common then to those countries where the gains of reform are not evident, appears to be the privatisation of the incumbent through an extension of the fixed line monopoly. This was the funding model proposed by international financing agencies in the 90s in order to attract investment in light of the generally poor state of infrastructure and the minimal customer base of most developing country operators.

"Strengthening African institutional capacity for research, analysis and debate in developing countries is an indispensable element in the construction of knowledge societies."

"Communication is what keeps one learning about other people. It is what keeps us together," says Nurse Patricia Madikane who uses a wireless network to provide medical consultation at Salitwa Village 100km north of Umtata.

The system allows Madikane to transmit real time images of the patient to the Nessie Knight Hospital in Solikama and simultaneously have a telephonic discussion with the doctor at the hospital. The doctor can tell Madikane what medicines to prescribe and how to treat the patient. This process takes 20 to 40 minutes. If the patient had to travel to the hospital it would take all day and cost approximately R20 in taxi fees.



The rationale for this was that often indebted monopolies needed the injection of capital and skills and the technology transfer to meet the challenges of expanding and modernising.

While formally concerned with policies to achieve affordable access, these models in themselves represented a compromise between the market access desires of multilateral agencies and the reluctance of developing countries to lose a major source of income generation.

This has often resulted in incumbents securing the rights to the other areas of restricted competition, either mobile, VANS or ISPs. Very often to further protect the revenues of the privatised incumbent – ostensibly to roll out services – players in the competitive market segments have also been required to acquire their facilities from the incumbent.

The resulting vertically-integrated dominant operator model provides the basis for what has become the standard market structure that has accompanied the opening up of markets. It is also at the core of the failure of the reform project in developing countries.

The anti-competitive incentives that arise in a market structured around a vertically-integrated national company are impossible to counter without constant checking of the integrated entity's behaviour.

This problem is compounded where rival firms are required to acquire their non-competitive facilities from it in order to operate as required in many developing countries.

This creates anti-competitive incentives for the incumbent to deny access to its network to rival firms.

Historically, the regulatory response to this market structure, which tends to arise wherever a former public utility enters into a competitive market, is access regulation. All regulatory mechanisms depend on relatively complex costing models that are particularly onerous to enforce.

This resource intensive regulatory approach arising from this market design places an enormous regulatory burden on any country seeking to ensure affordable access through the creation of a fair competitive environment and requires experienced and skilled regulatory staff.

Countries with far more experience in regulation, and with far greater skills and finances than most African countries, continue to struggle to implement access regulation successfully.

Expecting newly-established, under-resourced regulators, often put in place in the absence of political will, to fulfil this task would appear to be setting them up for failure.

The primary mechanism then of sector reform in many developing countries – privatisation of the fixed line incumbent through the extension of its monopoly – has had a demonstrably negative impact both on affordable access and market development.

South Africa is a case in point. The privatised incumbent has indeed become far more efficient, which has allowed it to extract monopoly profits, now repatriated, unconstrained either by competition or effective regulation of the monopoly. It has retrenched over 20 000 workers, cut off two million people who could not afford to pay for services, and benefited from over 160% increase in tariffs in the last five years, way beyond what was anticipated by rate rebalancing.

Far from privatisation resulting in the doubling of the network during the period of exclusivity as anticipated through the licence conditions, with the private monopoly's focus on the corporate market, there are probably fewer residential lines now than in 1997 when Telkom was privatised. South Africa is now one of the few countries in the world with a declining number of fixed line subscribers.

During the same period mobile services have gone much further in expanding universal service in South Africa; with the number of mobile subscribers at 14.5 million – almost triple that of the fixed network.

However, the potential of mobile to close the gap on basic voice communications should not happen at the expense of the continued expansion of the more affordable fixed network, without which the digital divide will increase between those with access to voice communications only and those who are able to participate in the economy and society due to their access to enhanced services.

It is for this reason that an environment conducive to investment needs to be created. Reducing regulatory risk is a critical aspect of this as is demonstrating that investors will receive a decent return on investment, particularly at the time that they are required to reinvest in the expansion of the network.

Stimulating investment in network roll-out, particularly after the heady dot.com days of the 90s and the subsequent recession in the telecom industry, may be one of the greatest challenges facing the African continent.

So, while independent regulation may be a necessary condition therefore of policy success in order to create the transparency and certainty required for sector growth, it may not be a sufficient condition. In order to deal with the extraordinary developmental challenges facing Africa, regulators will need to regulate innovatively, strategically and appropriately to the very different conditions that exist in African markets.

Alison Gillwald is affiliated with the LINK Centre, Graduate School of Public and Development Management, Wits University, South Africa. The Research ICT Africa! Project seeks to strengthen institutional capacity for research, analysis and debate in African countries. She can be reached at gillwald.a@pdm.wits.ac.za

This paper was originally prepared as an input to the ICTs for Poverty Reduction: When, Where and How? meeting hosted by the IDRC in Boston in September 2003.

Power to the people

Highway Africa delegates enjoy the sounds of Savile (right) – Grahamstown's local jazz band.

By Pieter Conradie and Wiida Fourie

On paper, a guiding principle of the public service in South Africa is that of "service to the people". In practice, however, providing effective access to government information and services in South Africa has proved to be a major problem, especially in rural areas.

In reaction to the challenges involved, the Government Development Communication Initiative has set up "multi-purpose community centres" (MPCCs) – an expanded version of the telecentres concept – as a major means of offering services through ICTs in rural and disadvantaged areas.

These involve not only establishing, but also providing some staff and logistical support to a series of ICT-equipped community centre structures that can house several government departments providing services to local communities.

By August 2003 a total of 42 MPCCs had been established countrywide.

But how effective are they? Since the beginning of 2003 Technikon Pretoria has been working with the Government Communication Information Service (GCIS) to research how effective ICTs are for providing information and services to disadvantaged communities. Here are some of the preliminary findings of the study:

Generally speaking, three main models of multi-purpose community centres are emerging:

The most elementary is a one-room structure that is erected in a rural area and that usually contains some ICTs and a number of counters for some crucial government departments (such as health and welfare, agriculture, labour, home affairs and justice). This structure can even be a refurbished shipping container.

The second is a more elaborate structure that contains several offices or rooms. There is usually a telecentre (one of the Universal Service Agency telecentres that has been given start-up funding obtained from social responsibility levies in the telecoms industry), as well as separate offices for the GCIS staff, the centre manager, and each of the government departments that provides services at the centre.

The third model is usually found in disadvantaged urban or peri-urban areas, and consists of separate buildings or structures for the government service departments involved, but all within easy walking distance of each other.

A serious problem found at the first two types of rural centres is that many of them have been erected in areas with no telephone lines, and also with a small likelihood of such services becoming available in the short-term.

This means that no online government services or Internet information provision can be offered and therefore telecentre activity is limited. Staff providing government services have to make manual notes of what transactions clients need, then travel to the nearest government service point that has the needed connectivity to carry out the transactions there. Also, clients usually have to make a second visit to the MPCC at a later date in order to obtain the processed documents.

The result is a protracted process in which the needs of the community member are met with some difficulty. At a few of these MPCCs the situation is even worse as there is no grid electricity available, and alternative sources of energy such as solar power panels are the only short-term solution.

Another problem often found at the first two types of centres is that the government departments at the centre only have budgets for their own activities, and there is a lack of funds for vital ongoing activities of communal concern, such as cleaning, security and

maintenance of the community centre as a whole.

Interviews conducted among communities using the third type of MPCC centres show that locals understand the possibilities and advantages offered by ICTs, and would like to make increased and more integrated use of such facilities.

The challenges

The South African government's initiative to use MPCCs for providing services and information to disadvantaged communities faces several major challenges. These include: connectivity, funding, governance and integrated service delivery systems.

The overseeing National Intersectoral Steering Committee (NISC) is involved in various fundraising actions that could see telephone and electricity links arriving in the remote centres.

In addition, the Universal Service Agency, an active participant in the NISC, is at an advanced stage of negotiations with a local service provider to connect its deep-rural telecentres, and therefore ultimately also many of the rural government MPCCs, with a year's free telecommunication connectivity via satellite.

The problem of MPCC governance is linked to the problem of funding, for it raises the question of who is ultimately responsible for the MPCCs, and who should therefore budget for the overall running costs. Government has recently decided that this responsibility should in future be carried by local government structures. This in turn presents a short-term financial problem, because no funds have been budgeted locally for this type of activity.

A detailed action plan to address the challenges facing MPCCs, as identified by a report of the Department of Public Service and Administration, has recently been developed. This is to be followed up by a memo to the Minister of Public Works and discussions with relevant stakeholders, and promises to contribute positively to the MPCC process in South Africa.

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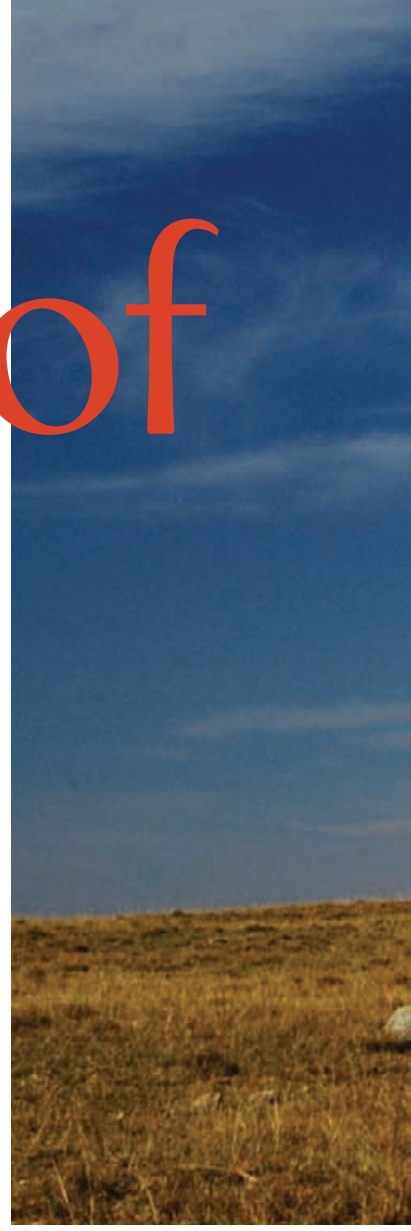
For further information see www.gcis.gov.za and click on MPCCs.

Outstanding Issues: Ownership

Expressions of



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By Robert Moropa

Indigenous knowledge is a body of knowledge that has been generated and has evolved over time in a community. It represents generations of creative thought and actions within individual societies (Kaniki & Mphahlele, 2002:17). It covers all the areas of the life of the community.

The following are some facets of indigenous knowledge in Africa:

Systems of education: Indigenous communities had specific methods of educating their members. Grandparents taught important moral lessons by narrating stories to their grandchildren, who looked forward to this time spent listening to exciting and sometimes frightening stories. Initiation schools form part of the education system among many African communities.

Beliefs: Among Africans the belief that ancestors are the intermediaries between God and members of the community.

Medicine: Traditional healers and other members of indigenous communities have used a wide variety of herbs as remedies for ailments. For instance the African potato has generally been accepted as having a wide range of medicinal applications, including as an immune system booster.

Theatre: Jafta (1978:9) says: "The African concept of a theatre is not the confines of a physical structure where multitudes congregate to witness a performance… theatre in African society… is an expression of life."

Technology: Thami Mseleku, Director General of the Department of Education in South Africa, speaking at an African regional conference of library and information service workers on indigenous knowledge said: "Iron produced in Africa was found to be far superior to anything that Europe could manufacture; and the gold and bronze works made use of technologies that Europe had not even thought about", (Mseleku, 2002: [2]) contradicting "the myth that Africans had no history, no skills and no social formations". This is confirmed by Mchombu (1993, 151) who states that indigenous technologies included iron smelting and the making of tools for farming and household use.

Initially the colonialists undermined indigenous knowledge by sidelining or systematically destroying such knowledge systems. Concerted effort was made to replace indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with modern or scientific knowledge systems (MKS).

The systematic undermining of IKS, coupled with the aggressive or even forceful imposition of MKS upon native communities led to the natives themselves adopting the mindset that western ways of doing things as better and superior.

Mchombu (1993:146), in a study conducted in various African villages to determine which of the two knowledge systems were preferred, found that the vast majority preferred western/modern based knowledge. Mchombu found that the reasons for a negative perception of indigenous knowledge were that, in general, western-based knowledge was considered to be the harbinger of progress while indigenous knowledge was viewed to be a stumbling block against progress.

The ultimate result of this sad state of affairs has been the loss of indigenous skills and expertise. A report entitled "Indigenous and traditional peoples of the world and eco-region conservation" (http:www.afrol.com/news/car003_indeg_knowledge.htm) highlights that languages spoken by indigenous peoples in the Central African Republic are rapidly disappearing. These languages embody the ecological knowledge accumulated by indigenous people during their long history of managing the environment. The disappearance of these languages will result in these delicate ecosystems being irreparably damaged.

The fact that IKS tend to be oral-based can also be seen as a challenge. Lack of written documents makes the preservation of indigenous knowledge difficult.

Fortunately IKS have not yet been completely destroyed. Members of some local communities are beginning to realise and accept that the local expertise, cultures and ways of living are not inferior and are beginning to assert themselves.

Creating space and the right climate

Space and the right climate should be created for IKS to grow and develop and to claim its rightful place alongside other highly developed knowledge systems of the world.

The World Summit on the Information Society, which has as its fundamental values equality, justice, democracy, solidarity, mutual tolerance, human dignity and respect for diversity, should condemn the destruction perpetrated against IKS and resolve to facilitate their reconstruction and development.

Members of the library and information service profession are concerned about the current state of affairs regarding indigenous knowledge and they recognise their strategic role as acquirers, organisers, preservers and providers of information.

In April 2002 about 400 members of this profession met around the theme "From Africa to the world – the globalisation of indigenous knowledge systems".

They recommended:

- that relevant information resources be designed to help children understand and appreciate IKS;
- that the involvement of elders within communities in teaching children about indigenous knowledge be facilitated and;
- that principles of property rights be used and made applicable to indigenous knowledge to allow the proper protection and use of traditional knowledge by members of local communities.

A major criterion for the success of the World Summit on the Information Society should be the extent to which the summit goes in correcting the injustices perpetrated towards indigenous communities and their knowledge systems. WSIS should draw up clear guidelines for creating the right climate in which indigenous knowledge will grow and develop.

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life

These are my words

By Sonja Boezak

I live in a small village where life passes like the seasons. Every day a 19-year-old friend, born in 1984, pops in to visit. I don't always know what he keeps himself busy with when I go on with my day, but he hangs around. And talks a lot.

Today I am distracted. Too many warbled connections, stories and information in my head. And, I wanted to write this piece with a double purpose – as a kind of heritage piece, something to be remembered. A memory in itself. Post-modern in the true sense of the word. But nothing has come. Too complicated anyway.

During the morning I had planned to finish this article and had printed out some information to read. While I get something to drink, my young friend picks up my notes. Today I am to read about the US Patriotism Act, printed on the back side of yesterday's reading, the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

He looks at the print-out.

He: What's this? Why are you reading all this stuff about Intellectual Property Rights?

Mm. Why indeed?

I: Because I'm writing an article about it.

He: Why? Are you interested in it?

I: Yes, I suppose I am. But the more I find out about it, the more I wish I didn't know.

He: (*inevitably*) Why?

I: Because there are some scary games out there that influence how we could live our lives, and our futures.

He looks puzzled.

He: Really? Like what? This Intellectual Property stuff?

I swear, I heard the capitals.

My partner comes out to join us. She can't resist what she'd deem "interesting conversation".

She: Explain the WTO game to him.

I: Oh dear.

He seems genuinely interested, which I find surprising, and I feel inspired to continue.

I: There's this organisation called the World Trade Organisation.

She: Have you found out who's behind it yet? The people, I mean.

I: No. But you could gauge a guess.

She: Yes, but I'd like names!

She hits her fist into her palm. We laugh. He shuffles in his seat, impatient.

He: What is it, though?

I: It's an organisation that has standardised some rules for international trade. They make up the rules. And if you want to play along in the game of international trade, you have to sign up to their organisation.

She: If you want to play, they show you the rules and tell you to sign.

I: Though the rules are public. They have them on their website.

She: And when you've signed, you can play. And those who don't sign, don't get to play the game.

I: And it's an important game. It can define the future of a country, in terms of economic power, and in terms of bartering – having something to take to the international market to sell. And more.

She: So, if you don't sign, you don't play. And if you don't play, you're out of the game.

I: And by extension, doomed. Sooner or later you're going to need aid, and your country will need to be "developed". But that's another story. So, you're out of the game. And this organisation, the WTO, has written up some rules relating to intellectual property.

He: What are the rules?

She: You can't read those things! Weird language.

I: It does make some sense if you read it carefully. Though I think it's sneaky.

He: But what do they say?

I, turning to her: What examples?

She: Basmati rice, Jasmine rice, indigenous herbs, the San, the hoodia plant…

I: Rooibos! Closer to home. By the way, did you know that MS Word's English (South African) spell checker registers rooibos as a spelling error? The alternative spelling options given are, booboos, rhombus, ratios, radios, and something else.

We all laugh.

She: But that's because Word is made in the US.

I: Yes, that too. It's also about establishing standards, in a different way. Anyway, it's stupid. What with rooibos now being American, they should at least know how to spell it!

We laugh. He doesn't get the joke.

He: What?

I: Do you know what copyrights and patents are?

He: Yes, but tell me anyway.

I: Copyright is the legal right given to someone, say an author, composer, playwright, publisher, or distributor, to exclusive publication, production, sale, or distribution of their work.

He: Okay, so like a book can be copyrighted.

I: Yes. And patenting is a grant made by a government that gives the creator of an invention the sole right to make, use, and sell that invention for a set period of time. Intellectual property rights are the rights given to

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people over the creation of their minds. This means that ideas can also be registered as belonging to you. (Granted it is in some "readable" format. Though "readable" isn't defined clearly in the document). Like rooibos, only grown in the Cederberg, here in South Africa...

She: ...is now American.

I: In London, if you want rooibos tea, you pay a whole lot for it, because it is imported.

He looks at me with his face screwed up.

He: No, really?

She: Absolutely, really.

I: Rooibos is African. And it's South African. But as South Africans, we can't claim its name when we are in the US. They have legal rights over the name 'rooibos'. And what that means, is that South African traders cannot use the name on their packaging in the US. The rooibos thing also means all kinds of other stuff.

He snorts.

He: So is that what this document is about?

I: Well, no. That's TRIPS. A set of rules that makes that kind of registering of rooibos possible. It regulates ownership on the one hand, and what can be owned by whom on the other.

She: Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

(I've been chided before for my unexplained use of jargon and acronyms. It excludes. And I was about to explain!)

She smiles.

I: Okay, rooibos. Here in South Africa it is considered a national asset, and as such, cannot be registered by any individual or company. And now, because they own the name, if we are to sell it in the US, it has to be sold under a different name. US sales make up about R120 million in annual income to the farmers in the Cedarberg. And the loss of that market means loss of jobs to loads of people in an area that already has about 80% unemployment. Tripped up by TRIPS.

He looks stunned.

She: And rooibos is not the only such example. There's Jasmine rice, from Thailand. There's Basmati from India, all copyrighted, owned, in the US.

We sit in silence. He seems to be thinking. One can never be too sure with teenagers.

He: So what is it you wish you didn't know?

I: Now that you know this, aren't you afraid? Don't you wish you didn't know?

He: But maybe this TRIPS thing and the WTO are there to protect people. Can't the South Africans go and complain at the WTO? Make a case or something?

Mm.

I: I suppose they can, but I don't know what would come of it. These things take time, and in the meantime, there could be a loss of income for these people. And if you lose too much money and can't employ people, you could lose your way out of the game.

She: Want to know what the logo is on the WTO web site?

He shrugs: Maybe.

She: An egg – the beginning of life.

He: What is the point of the game?

I: As with everything.

He: What? To win?

I: No, more. Power.

He: And what does that get you?

I: Everything.

He: And who has the power?

I: Make your own deductions. Work it out. The details will be different, the thefts will be different, but the answers haven't really changed.

I watch him draw a map in the sand. Most of his arrows and lines run from south to north. But eventually they seem so mixed up, you can't see the forest for the trees.

Another silence. He turns the page over.

He: And this? What's this about?

I: USAPA.

I deliberately say it to sound like "usurper".

He: What?

I look over to her, smiling. I know, I did it again. Acronyms. I do love them, though! A whole new language that grows and grows. Use it while you can. She winks at me.

I: The US Patriotism Act.

He: And why should this matter to you? It's a thing over there, in the States.

I: Yes, well. Again, it's a whole lot more. There are people's rights at stake. And that kind of extension of power can touch me and my little life here.

He: How?

I: In the UK, there's a law called the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. RIP.

He: Like Rest In Peace?

She: No, like RIPping you apart!

Laughter.

I: Here in South Africa we have one called the Regulation of Interception of Communications-related Information Act. What these, the US, UK and South African laws have in common is that they are based on the same rule: for governments to have access to information without a human (inter-)face, through the monitoring or interception of telecommunications (including email, postal articles) in the interest of national security. So, if they suspect you of something, they can get all kinds of information on you.

He: From where?

I'm comforted by his naiveté. The Internet hasn't yet changed his life. There might still be hope.

I: Anything electronic really. Cellphones, the Internet, banks, anywhere you have accounts. And if you use email and search the Internet or do your shopping online, they can have a look at that too. Even library systems. Checking what books you take out and deciding who you are. And if they decide that you have been looking at too many "terrorist" sites or have suddenly bought too many such books, or have had such emails, it may be in the interest of public safety to remove you.

He: What do you mean?

I: To take you to jail, or quietly make you disappear.

She: Have you heard that during apartheid, lots of things were done in the interest of public safety?

He: No.

I'm surprised at how depoliticised he is. How un-political. A sign of the times. To him it's history – from history books.

She: I'll tell you about it later.

I: And these kinds of laws make it possible to do that. They've done it in the US with this guy called Akil Sachveda (and some others) who, under USAPA, was held in prison for five months without access to a lawyer. Based on his Asian name, he was detained on suspicion of terrorism. And then, after all, they dismissed charges against him and set him free. Now he lives in Canada, only it's hard for him to get a job because he has this record of having been suspected of terrorist activities.

He: But how can they do that? And what about your privacy? I don't want my mother snooping in my stuff, no matter what good reason she may have. And then deciding I did something!

I get up to fetch my copy of the SA Constitution (1996).

I: Here it is. Read that.

I point to where he should read. section 14.

He reads aloud: "Everyone has the right to privacy, which includes the right not to have – (a) their person or home searched; (b) their property searched; (c) their possessions seized; or (d) the privacy of their communications infringed."

I: So, I suppose I'm also afraid of this loss of memory, about the absence of humanity in these new laws. And I'm afraid of things like surveillance, because it means controlling how I can possibly live my life. Those words in the Constitution spoke directly to a memory

of people's rights to privacy having been infringed during apartheid, through all kinds of brutality.

He: But now with the new laws it looks like they're forgetting?

I: Yes. And if we forget these things, we could end up in the same kinds of situations we had been in before.

He looks grave. Thinking again.

He: Now can I read the article you wrote?

I: No.

He: Why not?

I: Because it's not what I wanted it to be. I wanted to talk about Intellectual Property Rights and the Information Society in relation to stuff like memory, heritage and ownership. And it's just ended up in a bit of a jumble. Now the thing makes no sense.

He: What's the Information Society?

I: Just the words they use to define this new society that these laws speak to. In the draft document – that they're still arguing about (thankfully) – the Information Society is defined as being "characterised by universal access to and use of information for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge. In this society, new technologies, in particular ICTs, become an essential tool".

He: Okay, I see.

I don't know if he's understood what I meant, but I suppose the conversation has come to a close for now. I wonder if they would mind if I wrote the conversation as my own. I wonder if they would mind if I registered it, copyrighted it, patented it. My invention. My words. For the sake of posterity, the conversation will have been recorded.

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This is IT?

By Zane Ibrahim

We find that radio request programmes, or "dedications" as they are called in South Africa, decline when the weather is bad. During request programmes community people phone in and ask that we play a song for a loved one, for a wedding, a birthday, or whatever. The reason for a decline on rainy days is that those wanting to make their request to the station's presenter have to get wet lining up at the call box strapped to a pole in the township.

According to Statistics SA's October Household Survey for 1999, the number of telephone lines in South Africa rose from 8.31 per 100 inhabitants in 1989 to 12.47 in 1998, while in Malaysia, over the same period, lines rose from 8 per 100 inhabitants to 20.16.

So how do we tackle the scarcity of phones? We simply identify one reliable Bush Radio member of that community and give her or him a phone card. Each day that person makes sure to be at the phone box to activate the card and give the poor, unemployed people of the community, who want to express themselves via the radio, the opportunity to do so.

In a rural community in the Northern Cape, the people received equipment for a community radio station from the Department of Communications (DoC). The station came complete with a couple of computers.

The only problem is, nobody told the person running the telephone service office 200 kilometres away, about the importance of this radio station.

When I first visited the station, three years after they had been broadcasting, they still did not have a phone. In my urgent phone call to the director of the phone company, I had to use all my skills as a communicator and as an African elder to cajole him into getting his people to install a phone at the station.

When that did not work I tried another approach. I made him an offer he could not refuse. The phone was installed the next morning at nine o'clock. Pretending to be a sangoma (medicine man) with strange powers does have its benefits.

These are only two examples of how difficult we have had it on the ground when it comes to making use of information technology.

When a radio station servicing a quarter of a million people cannot have access to a phone and has to use expensive computers as typewriters WITH screens but WITHOUT ribbons, it is time for us to ask ourselves who is going to gain from this hardware dumping that we have been on the receiving end of, and why we are allowing it to continue?

We fully support the efforts of the DoC in their commitment to a strong grassroots media sector but we have very strong suspicions of those umbrella bodies and donor agencies that are always ready to supply stations with state of the art technology and then leave them to find their way without as much as a training leaflet.

The scary part is when these donor agencies or their lap dogs running the local and regional umbrella organisations come to monitor and evaluate us. And they do come… behaving just like weapons inspectors… but friendly.

As mature media activists we have to account for why there are upwards of 100 000 experts from the North running around our continent, trying to develop us, while we see none of our qualified media activists being utilised in that role.

We had to answer this question recently, when Bush Radio hosted an expert from Europe to come and help us sort out a technical problem with our broadcast equipment. After a two-week stay our equipment was in worse shape than ever before.

Soon thereafter we hosted a person from Zambia, Ned Chivube. When Mr. Chivube left, our station was running better than ever, and he trained the young people at the station to do simple repairs to microphones and headsets.

Whereas northern hemisphere experts come in at $500 a day, plus expenses, Mr. Chivube cost us a return bus ticket from Lusaka. He came because he cares about us. Because he wants a strong Africa in the future, unfettered by the mercenaries we are presently inundated with.

Southern Africa has enough "experts" with varied skills and we have to be extremely cautious when we enter into "partnerships" with those with questionable agendas, hell bent on becoming our saviours. We should learn to turn to our Ned Chivubes more often.

We fully understand that we will have to get a grip on the new technology but understanding how to use this technology is far more important than getting hold of the latest toys.

We must remember: our underdevelopment is a major industry and only 11 cents out of every dollar that is earmarked for our development, really reaches us. And, technology is not the saviour – the great social and economic equaliser. It is a tool. A tool that will help us overcome many difficulties we now face in Africa.

If we can identify scrupulous partners who believe that we should in the future benefit equally from any new technological developments, then we will not have to hang our heads in shame when our children one day, pointing to our diminished natural resources, our barren lands, exclaim in horror: "This is IT?".

I challenge all senior media practitioners and information technology activists to take some time out from their frantic pursuit of power and self gain and turn their attention to the future of our children by making informed decisions when it comes to how we can best grapple with the issue of technology.

One of the world's great development activists, the late Prince Claus of the Netherlands, insisted that "one cannot develop a people, they have to develop themselves".

Let us take up this challenge and take ownership of our own development.

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Touching the trademark

"In a world where **information is wealth**, reclaiming the means of production means asserting one's own voice into the media monopoly's mesmerising white noise."

By Julian Jonker

This is not an entirely serious essay. After all, it starts with an anecdote about a party. The party in question was a multimedia event by adbusting pranksters Laugh it Off (LIO), held last year in the fire-scarred shell of an old art deco cinema in Cape Town.

The "Culture Jam 2002" hosted exhibitions of LIO's brand-parodying T-shirts, though my highlight was bumping into a friend who, promptly and with a proud grin, dropped his jeans just enough to show off a newly altered pair of boxers. In front, imitating the Calvin Klein label in style and position, he had tagged the words "NAOMI KLEIN" with a black marker.

Take this anecdote as a sign of ambivalence. Culture jamming, a term which can describe a whole range of counter-cultural practices – from billboard liberation and appropriationist art to media hoaxes and "subvertising" – surrenders itself to ambivalence.

The practice of culture jamming (ab)uses the very cultural artefacts of consumer society which it seeks to critique, and so already takes its ambivalence seriously. When Naomi Klein, author of the anti-corporate bible No Logo, has her name appropriated as logo itself, one must abide the antinomy, or just laugh it off.

In a world where information is wealth, reclaiming the means of production means hacking the channels of communication, asserting one's own voice into the media monopoly's mesmerising white noise.

Culture jamming and appropiationist art take on copyright and trademark law to show that if information is wealth, and since information wants to be free, the wealthy should be liberated of their information.

Over the past year LIO has made the methods of culture jamming part of the South African national consciousness, garnering widespread media coverage of its battle with corporate giant SABMiller.

The world's second largest brewery had taken the Cape Town-based garage entrepreneurs to court over abuse of one of its trademarks. The offending item was a T-shirt – a spoof of the plaintiff's instantly recognisable Black Label brand.

The T-shirt had changed the logo's wording to read "Black Labour, White Guilt", and the slogans "America's Lusty Lively Beer" and "An Award-Winner Worldwide" had been replaced by "Africa's lusty lively exploitation since 1652" and "No regard given worldwide".

This was in keeping with LIO's irreverent catalogue of similar T-shirt designs, which parody brand names and logos from Diesel to the National Lottery, and even one depicting a gap-toothed Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the legend "Mind the Gap".

Justin Nurse, who heads the venture with friend Chris Verrijdt, quickly became a darling of the media. His firm's irreverent, anti-corporate stance has obviously captured the public imagination, as their designs grow increasingly popular. LIO proves that there is resurgent demand for anti-corporate sentiment. As Naomi Klein notes: "Something not far from the surface of the public psyche is delighted to see the icons of corporate power subverted and mocked. There is, in short, a market for it."

When police raided a Johannesburg retailer in search of an offending T-shirt, they found that the shop had sold out of stock.

SABMiller was not the only trademark owner to take action. A year before the brewery had decided to institute legal proceedings against LIO, Standard Bank had taken offence to one of the designs. The T-shirt depicted the bank's well known blue flag logo, adapted so that the flagpole looked like a penis, and with the legend "Standard Wank". The T-shirt retained the rest of the bank's slogan: "Simpler. Better. Faster." The bank laid an official complaint with the Department of Trade and Industry, resulting in the police raid.

LIO had also been threatened with legal proceedings by energy drink manufacturer Red Bull. At the end of 2002 a Danish toy manufacturer decided to follow suit, launching its own proceedings against LIO, who had produced a T-shirt showing two Lego figurines in an explicit act of "getting the leg over".

Diesel has followed suit. In fact the T-shirt makers' loss prompted South African singer Steve Hofmeyr to threaten them with defamation, after they had designed a shirt depicting the singer's face and the legend: "Wie's jou pappa?" ("Who's your daddy?") Hofmeyr declared that the T-shirt – which takes its inspiration from an online debate he had sparked off by asking questions about God and the church on the LitNet site – portrayed him as an atheist.

Both times Laugh it Off's response was one of dismay that the trademarks were seen as "untouchable", and then acquiescence in the face of the law's brute machinery.

It was with SABMiller's application to the Cape High Court that the subvertiser decided to test the corporate's "self-ordained sanctity of their brand". Nurse told the Argus that "[t]here is very little our society shrinks from satirising, yet we are afraid to mock big brands. In a society consumed by its own consumption, that can be extremely misguided." (Argus, 12 February 2003).

As the media hype grew, Nurse began sounding more politicised than his previous "no sacred cows" statements might have suggested: "We are hoping to draw attention to the way in which low-wage black labour is still building South Africa," he told the press. "White South Africans may feel guilty about it, but it's happening and it's something people don't talk about."

Yet it is surely the case that his original motivation was different to this, a less reasoned fury against the hypermediated existence of the empire of signs.

The decision of the court, taken on 16 April 2003, is illuminating. SABMiller had applied to the court in terms of s.34(1)(c) of the Trademark Act, a provision which prohibits the dilution of a registered trademark. The dilution clause prevents one from using a mark that is similar to the trademark holder's in order to take unfair advantage of the trademark's reputation or to dilute such reputation.

More specifically, this can mean one of two things: firstly, one may not use the trademark for inferior goods and thereby prejudice the good name of that trade mark ("tarnishment"); and secondly one may not use the trademark in such a way that the distinct association between the trademark and the original goods and services is diluted ("blurring").

The court was of the opinion that tarnishment had taken place. What about the Constitutional right to freedom of expression, which LIO had raised in their defence? Judge Cleaver held that LIO had exceeded the limits of freedom of speech, since it had deliberately exploited SABMiller's trademark for commercial gain, and since it was not "clean satire", but bordered on "hate speech".

It would seem that the judgement could be successfully challenged on legal grounds; it is safe to say that other judges might differ on where to strike the balance between the protection of trademark holders' interests and upholding freedom of expression.

Yet this misses a vital point. Reading through the short judgement it is striking how common-sensical, how unassailable its logic often seems. More specifically, LIO's reasons for acting are the reasons of the outlaw, and therefore reasons which could not be presented in court, never mind used to win in court.

Nurse, at one point in his deposition to the court, freely admitted that the firm had intentionally attacked SABMiller's intellectual property rights. His

"In capitalism's world of
who dares to overturn

reasons, should they have been more bluntly stated, are ones which would have been laughed out of court.

Nurse was upbeat after the decision in SABMiller's favour was given. "We will continue to challenge the role of large companies. Humour will always be on our side," he told the press soon afterwards (news24.com, 22 April 2003).

Laughing between the li(n)es, the case speaks of a broader confrontation, one which posed the decadence of the carnivalesque against the ornate decadence of the legal cathedral. Laughing in church – isn't that blasphemy? More to the point, are we allowed to take such laughter seriously? In other words, can we be serious about not being serious?

Culture jamming draws on the carnivalesque, an aesthetic that sites resistance in humour, the grotesque (just think of the "Standard Wank" shirt), the disguised, the turning of common sense on its head. LIO brought the carnival to the cathedral, and the media were less concerned with the goings-on inside the cathedral as supporters congregated outside.

If anything, it is the idea of carnival which best conveys the meaning of Hakim Bey's "temporary autonomous zones", those sites Mark Dery names "pirate utopias, centrifuges in which social gravity is artificially suspended".

Not only is social gravity lifted, but there is a sense of moral weightlessness. It is the cultural appropriationist's sense of humour that disrupts 'serious' moral conversations.

This laughter is the repressed frivolity lying behind enlightenment's persistent frown; it is the dark side of sense, nonsense, the jingle of loose cents in rationality's pocket. Laughter begins where rationality runs short. The outlawed signifier, the stolen sign – that which results from what Naomi Klein calls "semiotic Robin Hoodism" – wins its most significant battle when it loses in court.

In capitalism's world of legalised greed, the cultural outlaw is the new messiah who dares to overturn the merchant's tables outside the cathedral.

But is there really anything to laugh about? Is this not the last laugh of capitalism eating itself, the strange hilarity of a world in which Naomi Klein's name is a brand, appropriation a business model, and prêt-a-protest a perennial favourite on the trade negotiations fashion circuit?

In the South, the culture jamming fashion may at first seem to be simply self-serving adolescent rebelliousness. But when we find ourselves once more on the margin, this time on the periphery of an empire of signs, it is no mere laughing matter.

legalised greed, the cultural outlaw is the new messiah the merchant's tables outside the cathedral."

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the race to embrace...

Who benefits?

by Sarita Ranchod

In many areas and initiatives, high-tech "solutions" are being delivered to places that have no telephony or electricity access. In celebrating "roll-out" these are the vital bits of information the press release forgot to mention.

The eagerness to find a technological "solution" to age-old ills has little to do with people's lived realities. In my time working in the development sector – in the United Nations system, in local NGOs, in global networks of donor-paid activists, often preaching ICTs4D, I have not met an individual in any "poor" community who has a desperate need to get online, to be connected, to access the wonders of the Internet.

The development workers or their agencies would explain this away by arguing that people will not want access to something if they do not know about its usefulness.

Essentially, this view posits in more nuanced language that "the people" do not know what is good for them. They need to be shown and taught what is good and right.

Is that not the quest of modernisation, civilisation? To show the dark-skinned heathens The Way? Missionaries have taught us what is right in the absence of our knowing – taught us that what we know is wrong and what they know is right. And we have been complicit in our good manners, allowing them to, with a smile.

And so we place computers, sometimes with Internet connections in marginalised communities of the "poor" where people don't know what they need, and hopefully they will learn or be taught that these technologies are indispensable.

If all works to plan, we will create a dependency (converts, markets) and call that development, progress. Just to be safe, we'll also put an e in front of all socio-economic challenges (e-health, e-education, e-governance, e-employment, e-agriculture, e-environment) and those problems will immediately be under control. Between computers and the Internet all of the world's challenges can be solved. Haven't you heard the Word?

What I describe above is no different to discredited models of "development" that have been labelled colonialist, racist, imperialist, top-down, neo-colonialist, disrespectful.

But that was then. We've learnt lessons now. We've learnt about putting people first: human-centred development, people-centred development, participation, sustainable development, inclusion.

And somehow, in the Race to Embrace, we seem to remember very few of our "lessons learnt".

The one well-learnt lesson is that there is a great deal of money to be made out of poverty. Carrying the poverty/development torch is big business, especially if the ICT connection is made. Not making the ICT connection risks "marginalisation" and nobody can afford that. And so we are all bought.

The other lesson we have learnt well in the development industry is how to package well. The approach here is to do as has been done before, but include nice words like participation, community-driven, holistic, integrated, people-centred, sustainable…

We have learnt well from our brand-driven, consumer society to create the right image, to sell the product to the target market, to create needs, dependencies – ultimately, expanding the market. Business-as-usual. The rich get richer. The laptops get lighter.

In the ICTs4D sector, when we are not working from existing discredited approaches, we invent new ones, with our newer, smarter, faster toys. We dump cellphones on villages with no water, and we celebrate the technological breakthrough, the life-changing connectivity; we build high-tech centres of excellence in rural communities.

Just another white elephant. No big deal. Another tick. Another target met. Roll-out policy to rural poor effectively being implemented. (Must remember to book video crew and photographer to record happy natives playing with new toys.)

And then we bring in more technology, like satellite, to "leapfrog" our lack of telephony. And we call this progress. Access to satellite, but no roof over my head. A cellphone in my hand, but no drinking water. Welcome to the Information Society. Everything you need at your fingertips. Simpler, better, faster. Putting people first.

Which people?

To continue to pretend that we are speaking of "development" is dishonest. Who is being "developed"? Who benefits? The company developing, marketing and installing the satellite, or the nameless, poor "beneficiary"?

Unless development is premised on the exploitation of the many in the interest of the few, this is not development. Within this existing market-based approach to development, the historical "haves" continue to benefit.

They tell us what we need. We pay a great deal of money for them to tell us what we need. Or better still, their governments pay them from aid budgets earmarked for fighting poverty in the economic South, so ensuring the aid budget never leaves the shores of the giving country. Or we sign up to global compacts committing ourselves to their plans, forcing us to borrow (or risk censure), further indebting us to them.

Colonialism with a hand-shake and a smile? International co-operation? Development partnerships?

Who benefits? Whose development? Whose enrichment?

Experts demand expert-sized fees. It's hard work flying around the world halving global poverty. Creating a better world. There's a deadline to meet: 2015. Our jet-set ICTs4D experts, hopping from one expert group meeting or taskforce to the next with apparently no thought for the impact of those long-haul flights on the future of our natural heritage. Too busy fighting inequality, jet-fuel farting in the face of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) seven, which aims to ensure environmental sustainability by reversing the environmental degradation we continue to perpetuate.

Aid budgets do need to be spent somehow, and in the context of what the UN Development Programme (UNDP) calls "an acute development crisis, with many poor nations suffering severe and continuing socio-economic reversals", long-haul flights and fancy hotels are a good way of meeting that reduction-of-poverty-by-2015 goal.

Continued on page 46

"And we call this progress.
Access to satellite, but no roof over my head.
A cellphone in my hand, but no drinking water."

Continued from page 45

According to the 2003 Human Development Report (HDR) published by the UNDP, 800 million people, or 15% of the world's people continue to experience chronic poverty.

We say to them, take a byte of your computer. Drink your network. If you don't have a roof over your head, too bad, but here, shelter under the satellites. We know what's good for you. Sign here. Believe us. We know.

In neo-liberal parlance we hear much of the "fundamentals" being in place, referring of course to the economic "fundamentals" of the post Cold War world, the New Economic Order.

Fundamentals of this order include market liberalisation, the wholesale selling off of public assets into private (often foreign) hands, the creation of a foreign investor-friendly climate. Fundamentally, everything is for sale. Everything is a commodity available to the highest bidder.

In the development sphere, what would the basics, the fundamentals be? And how close are we to achieving them?

HDR 2003 reminds us that more than one billion people continue to live on less than R7 per day. Most of these one billion people also lack access to basic health services and safe drinking water. Think about how much you've spent today, the water and the food you take for granted. Could you cover your online bill on R7 per day?

The WSIS Plan of Action envisages a computer in every village by 2010. The Millennium Development Goals envisage the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty by 2015, and the achievement of universal primary education by the same time. Currently one in three African children has a chance of finishing primary school (HDR 2003).

What is the morality of bringing high-tech computer equipment to a community with no water supply, without adequate shelter?

Perhaps they could join an Internet chat room with other communities who also have computers and no water supply and discuss the benefits of an Internet connection, a computer, access to satellite and cellular technology, no clean water and inadequate shelter. They could build a network of communities globally with similar problems.

Seeds for revolution? Theatre of the absurd? Or real life immorality in action?

During my interactions with South African community radio stations not long ago, many did not have access to a telephone line. Those who did have telephone access often had their services suspended due to an inability to pay the bills.

Since privatisation five years ago, South Africa's Telkom has secured a 160% increase in tariffs, with two million users cut off from services during that period for an inability to pay the ever-increasing tariffs.

Much acclaimed privatisation has ensured decreased access for the majority, and an increasing focus on the top-end of the market. So who benefits?

The latest model doing the rounds in the high-tech delivery of services to remote areas mission is to provide free short-term telephony access via satellite.

Why? To build an appetite, create a dependency? What happens after the one year, after the satellite company has secured its installation profits? The community finds money to pay the bills, or another white elephant? Go ask the community radio stations. Any lessons learnt?

What does the global corporate consensus have to gain from the WSIS Action Plan?

Well, somebody has to electrify those villages, somebody else has to roll-out (or dump, depending where you sit on the scale) infrastructure, computer hardware and software (new markets), somebody has to build the "capacity" of the ignorant masses, somebody has to provide "technical expertise", somebody has to provide financing (or increased indebtedness, depending on how you look at it).

And guess who can do that for us?

Missionaries, mercenaries… what's the difference? Modernisation, civilisation, globalisation, colonialism… all systems of surveillance and control… what's the difference?

I write from a position of power, of privilege. I am literate, and well fed. Not only am I a user of the Internet, but I can credit the Internet for introducing me to great contemporary African warriors like Tewolde Berhan Egziabher, to being able to read Arundhati Roy's angry truths and Thabo Mbeki in his own words.

The Internet can be a useful tool. But do I need the Internet to live my life? Do any of us need the Internet? Is it a basic need? A fundamental of well-being?

I don't think so.

Sarita Ranchod has worked in the communications for development sector for a number of years. She is interested in issues of media, power, globalisation and morality and can be reached at sranchod@worldonline.co.za

Anthea Garman congratulates the winners of the Innovative and Rayborn Bulley (accepting the award for Manu Herbstein's

New space, same

By Rudy Nadler-Nir

By allowing users to access resources otherwise off-limits and to communicate with people around the world, the Internet is supposed to blur the lines of race, ability, and age.

Yet discussions of the "digital divide" abound, with the world divided into technology "haves and have-nots", "doers and do-nots", and "knowers and know-nots."

In other words, not everyone has, uses, or knows how to use technology.

By the way, there is a fourth group of computer users, a very troubling category – these are the have-to-haves. Created by corporations wishing to increase their sales, have-to-haves are people who have to have technology, and they are know-nots of the worst sort: they know not why they are using technology. Have-to-haves do not think critically about technology or understand that the Internet may have serious drawbacks or downsides.

The "digital divide" is a popular catchphrase in circles such as these. And we find various interpretations of the term.

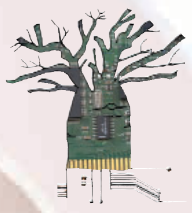
I'd like to offer an interesting – different – take on the issue of "have-nots and know-nots" in the hope that this will serve to open the discussion past the often-used interpretation of these terms.

In the United States, people like Joel Dreyfuss argued that the Internet is a cultural turnoff for African Americans. He saw the problem arising from what he calls "the whiteness of the web" represented by chat rooms filled with "a bunch of white guys talking to each other".

The emergence of such sites as NetNoir (1995) improved the situation only slightly, as the majority of the Net is still dominated, like television and other media, by white institutions: of the "100 Top Web Sites" selected by PC Magazine, not one represents or is owned by minorities. In this case, African Americans are have-nots, because the Net, by virtue of its current characteristics, excludes them from participating.

In an article in Salon Magazine, called "Is the Web

And the winners are...



By Kimala Naidoo

The gold at the Innovative Awards for New Media 2003 went to an online book about the Atlantic slave trade, an Arab newspaper, and a science website.

Manu Herbstein's www.ama.africatoday.com, which has published the book *Ama, A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, was announced winner of the individual category. In 2002 the book won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Herbstein beat off tough competition from other finalists, including Herman Manson's Media Toolbox (http://www.media-toolbox.net), and Nandiphotos.com, a photo gallery of people in Uganda, developed by Vincent Mugaba (http://www.nandiphotos.com).

Al-Ahram Online (http://weekly.ahram.org.eg), the online version of the Arab newspaper Al-Ahram, won the corporate category for its focus on science, technology and ICTs, and its independent coverage of the Middle East, especially the recent US-Iraq war. Al-Ahram beat competitors like eLink Publications (http://elinkpublications.co.za), and AfricaWoman (www.africawoman.net).

Janice Limson's Science in Africa (www.scienceinafrica.co.za), which won in the non-profit category, addresses scientific research in Africa. "It started off as a hobby to communicate science understandably," said Limson, a biotechnology lecturer at Rhodes University. "Now it reaches 50 countries."

There were 44 entries for the awards this year. Roland Stanbridge, journalism lecturer at the University of Stockholm in Sweden, a judge, said: "These awards are not just for sites that look good, but for those that address the needs of the continent."

New Media Awards: from left: Ahmed El-Gody (accepting the award for Al-Ahram), Janet Limson for Science in Africa Ama, a story of the Atlantic slave trade). *Photograph: Trevor Crighton*

For more information see www.highwayafrica.org.za.

disadvantages

too Cool for Blacks", African American writer Leonce Gaiter says that more problematic than the physical problem of access is the nature of the Net itself, which clashes with African-American culture.

Why is this? After all, the web is cool. The web is "new, chaotic, shamelessly undisciplined, alternately revolutionary and reactionary, the web, by nature, butts heads with entrenched Afro-American cultural truths. It mocks some of [American] fundamental beliefs, [and] core desires".

Gaiter says: "The web is considered a place. We call it cyberspace. We visit a website. The web is presented as a series of landscapes or neighbourhoods."

"…Through decades and generations of cross burnings and redlining and beatings and bombings and harassment, black Americans are wary of majority space. The web is no exception to the rule. "

Some suggest that the web is the great uncolouriser, the great colour barrier dissolver, because in cyberspace, one doesn't know what colour one's audience or conversation partner might be.

"But suggesting," says Gaiter, "that black Americans would take solace in conversing with those who would not show hatred or bigotry or cultural chauvinism toward them only because the other party didn't know they were black – that's insulting in the extreme."

We know of many examples of hate speech, hate blogs – or weblogs – and hate email online; this – in a way – is also a creator of the digital divide. In this case, access is not denied – but hate serves as a barrier to entry.

Rudy Nadler-Nir is a strategist-at-large and brain-forrent. He consults, lectures, speaks and writes extensively on e-communication. He was a founding member of iafrica.com
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The OSS promise

by Sim Kyazze

For Africa the attraction of open source software (OSS), is obvious. But for once, Internet intellectuals are not simply sounding off to annoy the rich north.

For the uninitiated, OSS is a baby of the non-profit organisation, Open Source Initiative, and works on the principle that programmers are able to read, use, redistribute and modify the source code for a piece of software.

From the name, OSS lives up to its moniker that it's free, it has an "easy-step" way of uploading, it includes the source code, and has no licensing or distribution restrictions, unlike Microsoft Windows or Oracle IT solutions, for example.

Open source software has some big-name enthusiasts, including Thabo Ndlela, who heads broadcast information technology at SABC; Dan Gillmor, a technology columnist with the San Jose Mercury News, the prestigious US newspaper; and Douglas Arellanes, head of research and development at the Media Development Loan Fund in Prague.

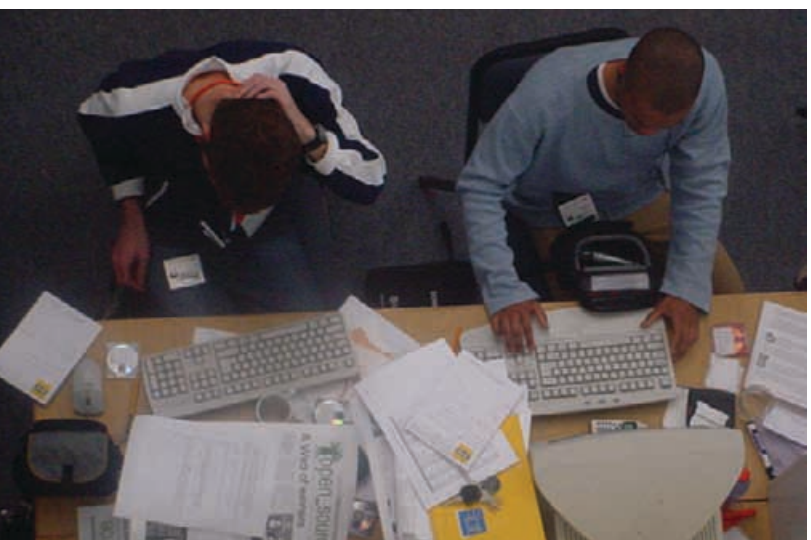
Gillmor is especially intrigued by the idea of writing locally and distributing globally. To do this, he proposed that stories be unique, be community-oriented, and they must also bear in mind the Internet's new rules and strategies (for example taking advantage of weblogging and creating links between Internet sites).

"Major events are essential to cover, but the lives of everyday people are stories we must be telling as well," Gillmor said. "The Internet is the medium." And what he probably wanted to add was that OSS was the software to help this along.

Ndlela has said that OSS is analogical with the democratisation of Africa and mentioned at least one school, Uganda Martyrs' University, that has completely embraced OSS.

Gillmor is convinced about the potential to help education in Africa and wrote in a recent column: "In Africa, in Asia, in much of the world — especially in the developing nations — open source is looking like the best way to usher in the information age. Around the globe, educators, companies and governments are getting tired of paying the Microsoft tax – which tends to rise inexorably – and sending the money to America."

Added Ndlela: "It does, however, depend on which business you are in. OSS might be more appropriate for education institutions as opposed to big corporate firms."



It is the big business tactics of the Microsofts of this world that have spurred all this recent interest in OSS, but the obvious need to be in on the Information Society has been a powerful incentive for Africans as well. Indeed, Ndlela views Africa's perpetual indebtedness as a real threat to its people's ability to dig themselves out of this hole, let alone be able to use open source software.

"OSS could be the answer to Africa's indebtedness by providing alternate computing to expensive proprietary licence fees," Ndlela said in an interview.

Ndlela thinks there are real advantages to OSS:

- It's less costly and quick to implement.
- It's more secure than proprietary software.
- It's more stable than proprietary software.
- It's more likely to conform to standards.
- It has immediacy of use and modification.
- It has a rich set of programmes and features.
- It has very few restrictions on its use (for example one cannot use it to set up a pornography site on the World Wide Web).
- It's a shortcut to technological independence.
- It bridges the digital divide by improving access to technology.

The real problem for Africa will be the commitment to OSS from governments. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) has some very strong and useful language on enhancing human capital to take advantage of the Information Society. It remains to be seen, however, whether the inspiration can be translated into real strategy and efforts to make use of open source software.

"Governments seem to be taking charge of this... even the SA government is advocating OSS, hoping for technical liberty and financial relief," Ndlela said. "The OSS community is taking charge in conjunction with OSS firms such as Red Hat."

But while this is true in South Africa, the same cannot be said of many other African countries.

"Who should take charge?" Ndlela asked. "I don't know… the public that seek alternative computing."

It seems that is as much as can be expected from the experts on how the continent can link up via OSS.

"OSS is not proposed as a uniform platform but an alternative from proprietary software," said Ndlela. "The essence of OSS would not suit uniformity since its research and development depends on the innovation of multi users. Open standards are however mandatory for OSS to succeed. It is open standards that the OSS community should adhere to as opposed to a common strategy."

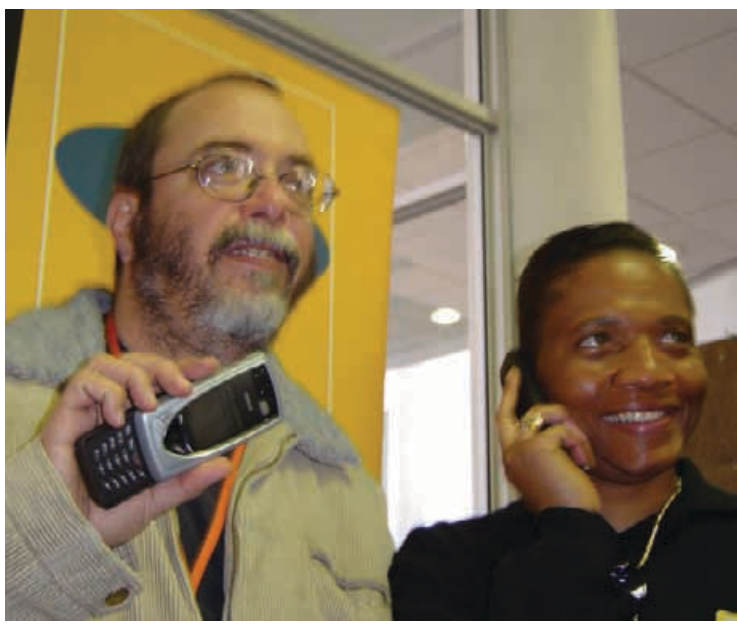
But can the big players in Africa (especially in South Africa and Egypt) embrace OSS and its potential to have bugs? Said Ndlela: "The big corporate firms use OSS in certain aspects of their business but I do not see it becoming the mainstream business computing platform."

Ndlela concedes that OSS is appropriate for some applications, "but I do not see it becoming the mainstream platform".

Open source software does not have to become the mainstream platform in Africa. It just has to be a building block for a continent that is short on money and anxious to get ahead in the World Information Society.

The "Open Source" (in spirit if not technology) newsroom at Highway Africa 2003.

Rudy Nadler-Nir and MTN representative Thandi Mokoena with their camera-included, video-recording-enabled, MMS- and GPRS-activated cellphones.



Can a cellphone do it for a journalist?

by Megan Knight

There is no argument that the cellphone has changed the way journalists work. But cellphones as connection tools are old news. Now, we are told, what a journalist really needs is a camera-included, video-recording-enabled, MMS- and GPRS-activated cellphone. With one of these, you can take pictures, record an interview, take notes, and download the whole lot across the network, all without coming back to the office.

During the Highway Africa conference, students from the New Media Lab at Rhodes University and I worked with Nokia 7650 phones donated by MTN to gather news for the conference's newspaper and website (www.highwayafrica.org.za/hac/).

These phones are state of the art, with cameras and audio- and video-recording functions. Unfortunately, they lack a keyboard, which makes writing copy difficult, although the T9 dictionary function does make text input with the numeric keypad far easier. The camera has no zoom function, and no flash, but is adequate for basic photography when no other option is available. Images are 640 by 800 pixels in size, fine for the web, smallish for newsprint, and useless for colour magazine production.

The video- and audio-recording functions are less than adequate: audio-recording might be useful for text journalists wanting to transcribe later, but no more. The quality is bad, and the file formats for both audio and video are uneditable by any means we could establish, and only replayable on another phone, or via the Nokia Media Player on a computer desktop. For the web, content needs to be available in the standard formats, such as MP3, MPEG and RAM.

To transfer content from the phone, there are a number of options. If the journalist returns to the newsroom, files can be uploaded to a PC using bluetooth, infrared, or data cable. Files can also be sent via a multimedia message, either to a phone in the newsroom that can then be used to upload to a PC, as described above, or to a computer functioning as a message server, attached to the phone network. You can also email files via GPRS, or, upload via a WAP interface.

In our experiments it took several long days of tinkering, phoning service providers and help desks, and scouring bulletin boards before we could rely on getting the picture.

So, having tried to make cellphone journalism work, I'm afraid my verdict will have to be: "Nice idea, but don't sell your cybershot and mini-disc just yet."

Megan Knight is Johnnic New Media Lecturer at Rhodes University. m.a.knight@ru.ac.za

Prof Peter Clayton of Rhodes University's Computer Science department presents the Telkom Interactive Multimedia Project to the Highway Africa delegates via satellite.

Systems that work for

By Virgil Tipton

A few years ago, a newsroom information manager at a newspaper in the United States was getting frustrated. No surprise there — newsroom information managers' lives are full of frustration, panic and other raw emotions. In this case, the manager saw that reporters and editors were wasting prodigiously the newsroom's most precious commodity — knowledge. The manager, George Landau of the St Louis Post-Dispatch, realised that he could do something about it.

His frustration and the insight that followed led to the founding in 1996 of NewsEngin Inc, a small software company with a remarkable list of customers and a remarkable approach.

Here's my disclaimer for the report that follows: I'm the chief technology officer for NewsEngin. I was so impressed by Landau's vision that I resigned as deputy editor of the Post-Dispatch in 2000 and joined NewsEngin, when its customer list already included The Boston Globe, The New York Times and The Washington Post. My colleague Jim Mosley, also a former editor at the Post-Dispatch, had joined a year earlier as CEO.

Here's what is compelling about this story for African journalists: as you join the Information Society, you'll have choices about how to manage information in your newsrooms. However you build or enhance your systems, I'd encourage you to think about how to manage not just stories, but the wealth of other knowledge available in your newsrooms.

First, a couple of salient facts about journalism not always acknowledged:

1. Newsrooms know more about their communities than any other single source. But often that information is scattered in small puddles. Power derives from combining those puddles into one central lake.
2. Journalism starts before anyone starts writing a story and continues after the story has been published.

Journalists are knowledge workers. They refine news from knowledge gathered from and about their communities. That knowledge can and should be retained and made easily accessible to everyone in the newsroom. That helps produce deeper, more informed coverage; better continuity; fewer mistakes and, in the end, a more enlightened community.

Journalists understand this. Software designers often don't. So instead of providing journalists a way to store and share the raw material they use to craft stories, many software designers simply provide a big box for journalists to write their stories in. What results is that everything gets typed into the big box and, at the end, the raw material — interviews, phone numbers, quotes from documents, etc — gets cut.

It doesn't have to be that way. With any level of technology, newsrooms can establish systems to share information more easily. For example, newsrooms can use shared source lists. They can share story plans so that everyone knows what's running in the paper. And they can share a common calendar of upcoming events.

Key is a change in mindset, that it's beneficial for everyone in the newsroom if much of our information is shared. The result will be journalists spending less time hunting around for information someone already

"Stories are just an expression resource: the knowledge about

Weblogging is 'We Media'

By Sim Kyazze

"Blogging technology has begun to deliver on some of the wild promises about the Internet that were heard in the 1990s," wrote Matt Welch in the September/October issue of Columbia Journalism Review, America's leading media monitor published by the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

Internet junkie and surfer supreme Jorn Barger is credited with this definition: "A weblog (sometimes called a blog or a news page or a filter) is a web page where a weblogger (sometimes called a blogger, or a pre-surfer) 'logs' all the other web pages she finds interesting." Barger says the format, "is normally to add the newest entry at the top of the page, so that repeat visitors can catch up by simply reading down the page until they reach a link they saw on their last visit."

Another feature of the weblog is that each post contains one, and often several, hyperlinks to other websites and stories, and usually there is a standing list of links to the author's favorite bookmarks.

In a sign that the Internet is catching up with the rest of the world in terms of bickering, some people have tried to change this definition, others have denounced it, while others have jazzed it up. Still others (the majority) have decided to just do it: to become webloggers.

South African Rudy Nadler-Nir, whose expertise lies in the creation of mostly online communication concepts and strategies, is a passionate weblogger. Nadler-Nir got together with Arthur Goldstuck of World Wide Worx and Dan Gillmor, technology columnist at the San Jose Mercury News in the US, at the 2003 Highway Africa Conference in September, to talk about the democratising influence of weblogging.

Gillmor talked about convergence by suggesting, "we started with 'Old Media', added 'New Media', and then we added 'We Media'. Making the news is now possible for anyone."

"Are weblogs a form of journalism?" Nadler-Nir asked. He answered himself by asking another rhetorical question: are the telegraph, tape recorder, photography, the modem, or the ultra-modern videophone a form of journalism, or are they just mediums? Nadler-Nir said they are mediums, and so are weblogs. He called them "a collaborative medium" with "commentary pages" and which occasionally look like "online diaries".

Nadler-Nir admitted that he was a big fan of the Drudge Report, the website that first revealed the adulterous relationship between President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky in 1998, and effectively put weblogging on the map.

Gillmor, perhaps owing to his background as a nuts-and-bolts journalist, was more wary and was quick to quip that much of what the website said about the Clinton-Lewinsky story at the time was false. This point, Nadler-Nir acknowledged, but he too massaged it with his own quip: "At least he got the story out where Newsweek failed!", referring to the fact that Newsweek, the prestigious news magazine, had had the Clinton sex story for months, but did not have the courage to run it until it was broken on the Internet by a weblogger!

Weblogging is therefore clearly exciting. But it is so much removed from the daily existence of even regular Internet users in Africa.

This will not be for long. Said Matt Welch in the Columbia Journalism Review: "Blogging technology has, for the first time in history, given the average Jane the ability to write, edit, design, and publish her own editorial product — to be read and responded to by millions of people, potentially."

Said Gillmor on this exciting new development: "Journalism's new world involves ubiquitous networks and powerful new tools for reporting. Anyone can publish. It empowers not just the former audience but also the people (and institutions) we cover."

It seems, then, that weblogging is up the alley of the alternative media that has captured the imagination of many African commentators in the recent past. What Nadler-Nir, Gillmor and Goldstuck all agree on is that weblogs are cheap and simple, the software is widely available and it's easy to install.

As Gillmor said: "Weblogs can complement traditional journalism." Blogs can break news and keep issues alive, he added.

Now all we need are weblogs clanking away at African stories.

Dan Gillmor – weblogger

journalists

has collected and more time doing journalism.

To show how these ideas might manifest themselves in software, here are descriptions of some of the tools that NewsEngin has developed:

- SourceTracker: like some other NewsEngin tools, it's based on Lotus Notes. It provides a personal database for reporters and editors to store information about people, interviews, documents and drafts of stories. They can associate those bits of raw material with stories they're working on. And they can share those pieces with other people in the newsroom. They can clone the database to a laptop and take it with them into the field.
- My NewsEngin: a more advanced form of SourceTracker, this tool automatically builds a navigational interface for journalists based on their roles in the newsroom. They can have one-click access to all of the tools they need to do their work. NewsEngin built this tool in partnership with The Boston Globe.
- NewsFront: stories are edited in this central database. As they move through the editing process, they automatically build story plans — what journalists in the States call budgets. The newsroom can see at a glance what stories are planned for which section of the paper and how far along they are.
- EventTracker: NewsEngin is building this tool in partnership with The Washington Post. It will provide a central database for all event-driven information that the newspaper or its website will publish. Information can be exported out of it already formatted for publication. This tool is based on the open-source platforms of MySQL and PHP.

Whether or not African journalists end up with tools like these, I hope you will listen to the spirit that produced them and understand that stories are just an expression of a newsroom's greatest resource: the knowledge about its community. Journalists — and, more importantly, our communities — are better served when we manage that resource wisely.

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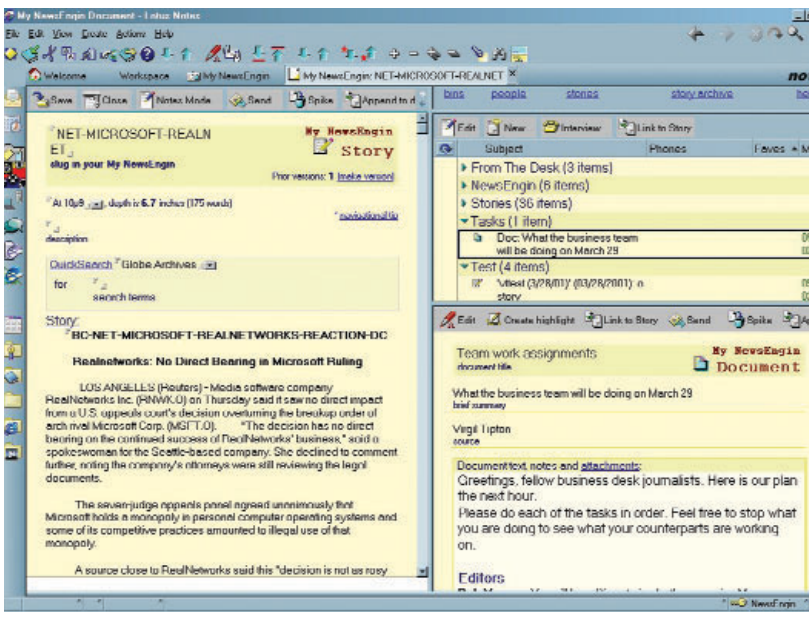
of a newsroom's greatest its community."



Above: My NewsEngin

Left: Virgil Tipton and Highway Africa delegates

Research

The World Internet Project

By Sim Kyazze

Here's a disturbing detail from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): only 1 in 118 Africans has access to the Internet. This ratio is actually skewed, partly because it averages out statistics in big countries (Egypt, South Africa) and the big cities (Johannesburg, Cairo, Cape Town, Lagos) with their poorer country cousins (Central African Republic, Mauritania).

The dismal stats have, however, not dampened the enthusiasm of Prof Jeffrey Cole of the UCLA Centre for Communication Policy. Cole presented findings from a World Internet Project on various aspects of the Internet at this year's Highway Africa conference. But Cole was actually more interested in speaking to potential partners from the continent.

"We absolutely must have African partners or we cannot call ourselves truly a world project," Cole said. The World Internet Project is pining for South Africa and Nigeria, because, as Cole says, "we really cannot say we've done Africa until we have done [them]," together with another four others, which might include Mali, Ghana, Mozambique and Zambia.

The original UCLA Internet Project in 1999 surveyed 2 000 households across the United States, compiling responses of Internet users and non-users. Each year, the researchers have tried to contact the same households to see how ICTs are affecting continued users, new users and those who have refused to engage with ICTs.

The real value of the UCLA Internet Project is that it's the first trans-boundary study of Internet use and how this is influencing the social, political and economic behaviour of both users and non-users.

Now in its second year the primary goal for the project is to monitor the effects of the Internet, which as the report notes, "represents the most important technological development of our generation".

"Its effects may surpass those of television and could someday rival those of printing," the report notes. "Had research been conducted as television evolved in the late 1940s, the information would have provided policy-makers, the media, and ultimately historians, with valuable insights about how broadcasting has changed the world."

The project has since incorporated 19 countries from North America, Europe and Asia (especially IT-heavy Taiwan, Hong Kong and some big Chinese cities), and uses the same paradigm to test for the same phenomena in all these countries.

Cole is of the same mind as many people who have predicted mostly good things coming from Internet use in Africa, especially in research (reducing the costs of scholarship), health (combating HIV/AIDS), democracy and bringing African peoples closer together.

"It's a remarkable source of valuable information on AIDS," Cole said. "And in China, [the Internet] has also been remarkable. The government had two choices: to bar the Internet and hold back the country's economic development, or allow the Internet and occasionally censor it. It chose the latter route and the results have been remarkable." This two-steps-forward-one-step-backward approach is still progress, says Cole.

In his study, Cole and his partners have looked at whether continued use of the Internet weans people off television (it does), whether it affects their understanding of governance (it does), whether it increases their cynicism about honesty and truth telling in the media, government and international affairs (it does) and a whole range of other issues.

For Africa, it's important to get in early on these effects of the Internet on democracy, for example: organising around common issues, reduction of costs of education materials, helping in research, empowering previously disadvantaged groups like women (in gender, sexual and reproductive rights), as well as democratising the media and empowering indigenous people to tell their own stories.

The last two issues might perhaps be the most significant influences of the paradigm shift in African media and how they are interacting with the Internet, wrote Jay Rosen of New York University recently.

"Do Net-surfing patients stop trusting their doctors? No, but they are less likely to be overawed. Something like this is happening in journalism, making users more assertive," Rosen said.

There is no doubt that Jeffrey Cole and the UCLA Centre for Communications Policy will soon have African partners in the World Internet Project.

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If you think that multi-media is not for Africa...

Photographs: Stewart Stanbury

By Brian Garman

Over 20 years ago I sat myself down in front of the first Apple Mac to arrive in our department and far from being excited by it, I can remember thinking "this'll never catch on..."

Boy, what a idiot! I am not making that mistake again – I have spent parts of the last two years working on a couple of multi-media projects (which are included on the CD at the bottom of this page) and now, I am excited.

But this time there are a whole lot of other people saying that this'll never catch on – well, not in Africa anyway. Few deny that web-based multi-media is a powerful journalistic tool. It is able to move story-telling on the web beyond a heavily text-reliant medium, through its use of pictures, audio, video, graphics and animation. But it has its drawbacks: it is very demanding of bandwidth, requires a high capital input and considerable expertise – all of which are in short supply in Africa.

But the stories on the two websites on the disc were crafted mainly by students with little or no experience in multimedia. They are two of the products of a collaboration between the departments of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina (UNC) and Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

The sites were created, with Prof Rich Beckman from UNC as executive producer. The first, in 2002 with funding from the Fulbright Commission, is called "A Living Stage" and uses the South African National Arts Festival in Grahamstown as a starting point from which to investigate and tell the stories of ordinary people living in the town.

This site, while containing beautiful stories, is one of those big, slow sites. But by 2003, we had got cleverer and the software had got better too. With the support of Telkom, were able to continue the collaboration to produce a new site which looks at the development of peoples' lives in a young democracy – just 10 years after the official demise of apartheid. There is some innovative stuff on this site. With the aid of staff and students from Rhodes' Telkom Centre of Excellence in Distributed Multi-media in the computer science department, we have been able to include some interesting stuff like a bandwidth "sniffer" which detects whether you have low, medium or high bandwidth and delivers appropriately packaged content for the speed of your connection.

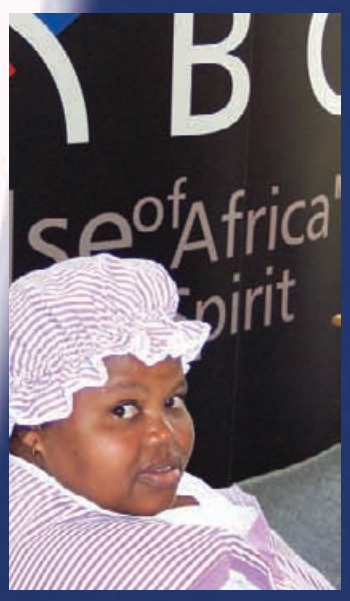
But ultimately, getting to grips with all this technology is not the main issue. For journalists, it is about telling stories. Web-based multi-media is a very powerful tool for doing just this and should not be written off as an inappropriate technology. Collaborations like this give us the opportunity to take first-world technologies and bend them to fit the needs of our continent.

Yes, multi-media is for Africa.

...then look at this

This CD contains the Highway Africa 2003 presentations and reports and the multi-media websites www.alivingstage.org (2002) and www.tenyearson.org (2003), produced as part of a collaboration between the School of Mass Communications at the University of North Carolina and the departments of Journalism and Media Studies and Computer Science at Rhodes University.

The production and printing of this CD and the tenyearson site were made possible through the generous sponsorship of Telkom.



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