

“IT IS A CRISIS, IT JUST WASN’T A CRISIS ACCORDING TO HOW WE AS JOURNALISTS EXPECTED IT TO BE.

IT’S AN INDICTMENT, IT’S A PROBLEM WITH JOURNALISTS THAT WE FOLLOW THE PACK, AND WE FOLLOW CERTAIN STORIES THAT ARE IN THE NEWS AND WHEN IT’S OUT OF THE NEWS IT DIES.”

KHADIJA MAGARDI, JOURNALIST

“DO I THINK WE ACTED RESPONSIBLY? ABSOLUTELY. DO I THINK THE NGOS ACTED RESPONSIBLY? NO. I THINK THERE WAS A LOT OF FEAR MONGERING BEFORE THE WORLD CUP.”

KEVIN RITCHIE, EDITOR, SATURDAY STAR

“I’M NOT REALLY CONCERNED ABOUT FIGURES FOR ONE REASON AND THAT IS, WE WERE BUSY WITH AWARENESS FOR TWO YEARS.”

CORINNE SANDENBURG, DIRECTOR, STOP

“YOU ALSO HAVE TO BE AWARE THAT SOMETIMES DONOR INTERESTS DRIVE CONCERNS.”

JOAN VAN NIEKERK, CHILDLINE

“WHEN YOU GET TO THE CHARGE OFFICE [WITH A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING] THEY DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT, THEY REFER YOU TO A TRAUMA ROOM, AND THEN IN A TRAUMA ROOM THEY’LL SAY WE DON’T KNOW HOW TO HELP YOU.”

BABALWA MAKHAWULA, NEW LIFE CENTRE

“IT’S NOT ALWAYS THAT SIMPLE TO IDENTIFY A VICTIM OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, MANY OF THE GIRLS OR THE WOMEN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF THIS CRIME, THEY THEMSELVES DON’T ALWAYS KNOW THAT THEY ARE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING DUE TO ITS SUBVERSIVE NATURE AND THE AMOUNT OF DECEIT THAT IS INVOLVED.”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT MARCEL VAN DER WATT, HAWKS

These were just some of the comments and insights uncovered by child journalists tasked with exploring how human trafficking exists in South Africa, and how the issue was portrayed in the media in advance of the 2010 World Cup, and whether the two are complementary or conflicting.

The comments were included in the radio documentary created by Media Monitoring Africa’s (MMA) first two child journalists, grade 7 pupils Khotso Zinhle and Khumo Baduza. The documentary *Child protection and trafficking: is the media telling the right(s) story?* was a component of Media Monitoring Africa’s broader project by the same name.

The project’s vision was to bring this specific child-related issue to children, to equip them with knowledge and skills that would enable them to critically engage with media, to develop their own understanding of the issue of human trafficking and finally have them evaluate how it was handled by the media by using their newly-acquired skills.

The capacity and capabilities of our 13-year-old journalists were never in doubt. What was challenging was setting out with them to untangle the complexities of human trafficking in a South African context, how it was portrayed by the media, why it was reported in this way, and ultimately whether this was helpful or unhelpful, and why.

This would have been a challenge for any journalist, and indeed we went on to find out that there were many misunderstandings and misconceptions about this issue at different levels. It certainly helped that our child journalists were curious, critical and hungry for answers.

The project was a multi-faceted one. MMA trained child media monitors and it was from these media-savvy students that we selected our trainee reporters. Even in the earliest stages the child journalists demonstrated great insight into the issue, with Khumo Baduza telling a press conference on children’s rights on 12 June 2010, day one of the project, that “human trafficking didn’t arrive with the World Cup!”

A valid question is why we opted for a radio documentary rather than a written story. Essentially we wanted to produce a product in which the children’s voices would be heard, and in so doing, challenge any idea that this is an adults-only discussion, especially when it largely affects children. It is one thing to have journalists and media professionals report on children’s issues, it is quite another for children to then hold the journalists as well as the NGOs to account for the way the issue was put across.

A child’s voice would catch the ear of listeners in a radio documentary in a way not possible in a written piece and this medium provided a much more imaginative and tangible platform for the children to reach an audience of adults as well as their own peers.

The plan was to equip children with greater knowledge and understanding of the broader issue of human trafficking, but specifically within the South African context. Then to pose the question and help them come up with a way of getting that question answered.

Their journalistic training began with a workshop to introduce the two girls to the process of compiling and producing a story, and examining where news comes from, and the choices involved from picking a story idea, to identifying interviewees, to deciding how a story should be structured.

We also explored with them the different types of journalism, from reactionary news stories, to opinion pieces, to investigation and analysis. Aside from, “the who, what, where, when, why and how” questions they would need to ask, we also examined why “so what?” was going to be an important tool for them in establishing the impact and relevance of the information they were to uncover.

Next up were the particulars of making a piece for radio, and how they may differ from

TWO REPO UNTAN COMPL OF TRAI

print or television. Concepts such as using sounds alongside voices to create interest for listeners were explored, and the impact sounds could have been teased out.

Interview tips and techniques were also on our mini-syllabus, as well as exercises on structuring a story, without pre-empting your interviewee’s answers. But the real classroom was out in the field. Before setting off to untangle the mixed messages about human trafficking and the World Cup, our journalists took on a shorter documentary, examining issues of child safety more broadly.

This exposed them to the realities of identifying a story they wanted to tell, choosing interviewees, setting up interviews and carrying them out, and sifting through material to structure a radio piece that was both informative and engaging. The theme of child safety was also closely linked to human trafficking and what their appetite and interest for the slightly more daunting challenge ahead.

The journalists embraced the task of asking “is the media telling the right, or indeed, a human-rights based story about human trafficking?” As media monitors, they had already been looking at how various media outlets were reporting human trafficking, and this gave our journalists a head start. MMA also had a team of adults conducting media monitoring of these articles and was keeping track of different articles that appeared dealing with this issue.

Our child journalists selected a public service announcement by NGO STOP; warning that 100 000 women would be trafficked into South Africa for the 2010 World Cup; and a newspaper article “Human trafficking – the cup crisis that never was”, and began their journey of finding out what lay in between.

We brainstormed with the children about who they would like to access. They very quickly determined that police, social workers, NGOs and media professionals were the ones who could help us. Additionally they felt it necessary to speak to ordinary citizens as they were the ones who the media communicated to.

What followed was an insightful journey with our two child journalists, not only in getting to the bottom of the question we were trying to answer, but additionally into the solid grasp that they had of the task at hand. With each new interview they conducted, the girls’ tenacity increased, as did their realisation that adults can sometimes talk in very indirect language and not simply, clearly and straight to the point; in fact at times avoiding directly answering their questions entirely. During interviews, despite having had already decided on certain questions in order to stay on track, new dots were connected, and incredibly intuitive and important questions were asked by the girls that had previously not been thought of.

Press release reliance, unhelpful stereotypes, a lack of local context, an NGO’s inability to stand over figures it

CHILD REPORTERS UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES OF FICKING



disseminated, and indications that well-intentioned but perhaps over-eager and ill-informed international donors all contributed to a frenzy about human trafficking, followed by fatigue. This was the story uncovered by the two 13-year-old journalists.

Theirs was an exceptional journey that culminated in the documentary premiering to an audience of journalists, government and NGO representatives, police, and other interested stakeholders. Their work sparked a debate about roles, most especially those of journalists and NGOs, and how to ensure accuracy and balance sensationalism against sensitivity.

Both journalists were commended by host Jeremy Maggs for “probably having the best handle on the issue”, while Khotso Zinhle had this advice for her fellow journalists: “Media need to stop being lazy and give Google a rest.”

Through the entire process, what became apparent was the capacity of children who, if given the right support, input, encouragement and skills, can and want to accomplish something truly significant. MMA’s first two child journalists have been equipped with so much more than merely the ability to operate a

voice recorder, they have been given the courage to ask questions and call on people to answer them. They are able to analyse media and assess what is communicated to them in a far more critical manner. They are able to discern what messages they receive.

We have helped set them on a road to critical analysis and media awareness, the rest of the journey is up to them. What is even more exciting is that with the establishment of the Children’s News Agency, more children are following in their footsteps. In the meantime look out for these names – Khotso Zinhle and Khumo Baduza. We strongly suspect you have not heard the last from them!