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# A place for Media Activism



Diana Regisford, Kaya FM and Colleen Lowe Morna, Gender Links Executive Director at the launch of the 365 Days Programme, Union Building, Pretoria, South Africa, March 2007

*Credit: Trevor Davies*



## **An activist and a journalist?**

By Zarina Geloo

I asked a group of journalists who were meeting at a regional conference in South Africa once, how journalists should draw the line between activism and a profession that calls for a certain amount of detachment.

None could give me a straight answer, save to regurgitate the “a journalist should never get involved in the story or else they lose their objectivity.”

I had just narrated to this group of journalists of how my newspaper managed to get a sitting Commander of the National Air Force fired by the president for abuse of office. He was allegedly coercing his secretaries to have sex with him and rewarding them with favours paid for from allocations meant for the defence of the nation.

The story ran for about four weeks until the Commander was fired. It was a great story and the newspaper received great credit, which was great, but it was what happened in between that gave me the feeling that I had perhaps blurred the line between just doing my job and joining a crusade. I was uncomfortable in this role as an activist.

When it looked like the story was flagging, I engaged with the women’s movement who were initially very reluctant, this was after all a powerful man. I put it across to them that this was an advocacy point for them (sexual abuse) and they rose to the occasion to give them their due, and began to look for ways in which to help the victim and I

reported all that.

Then I began to become actively engaged in finding solicitors for the victim. I spent days with the victim going from one police officer to another, to get her statement and open a docket. This was not journalism and I knew it, but I could not stop myself. The story was so horrifying; I felt the victim’s anger.

When the Non-governmental Organisation Coordinating Committee (NGOCC) held a press conference condemning acts of abuse and urging government to deal with the matter of the General and his victim, I was involved in organising the press conference; I edited and even signed off on the press release and called up other media houses to attend the press brief. Should I have been that involved? My friends in the media did not think so. They asked why I was organising them to attend the meeting; they suspected that I was up to something because this is just “not the done thing.”

Soon after that, the newspaper got the reputation for fighting ‘the woman’s battles;’ I had loads of stories coming in from the NGOs and public as well. One story was of a young Somali girl who was born and raised in Zambia and whose parents wanted to spirit her away to marry some stranger in Somalia. She was already at university doing her first year.

It was a regular story but again I found myself on the

other side. I sided with the girl against her parents; I collaborated in keeping her hidden until she got a restraining order; I constantly called her to give her encouragement. I encouraged other media houses to write stories on early marriages and its evils. Again, I crossed the line. I was not spared the wrath of the girls' parents who asked whether I was a police officer, a judge or a journalist. Many media people asked the same question, somewhere more forthright, and asked me why I had bothered to set up a newspaper when I really should have formed an NGO.

They have every right to ask, journalists do not go around as collaborators. They do not help in creating the story. They have to keep "their objectivity."

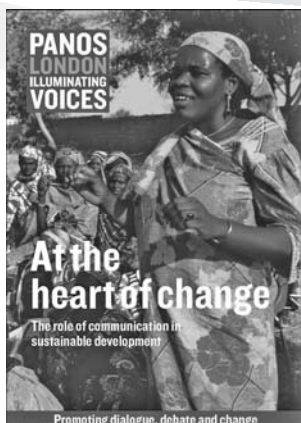
It is an uncomfortable place I find myself in, because on the one hand I agree that journalists must maintain a professional distance from their stories. I still remember the mantra of not getting emotionally involved, remaining detached and just telling the story like it is.

On the other hand, how can someone be objective in the face of human rights abuses, especially against vulnerable people like children? How can someone's misery not touch you and move you into action?

Besides, how many times are journalists being told to get "involved," to be more aggressive, to be militant on social issues; isn't this why every sector wants to "build the capacity" of journalists so that they can understand issues and report more effectively? This is the foundation for activism.

This is what I say to convince myself when I attend demonstrations, that I am doing the right thing. I have not found that balance between activism and being a regular hack. I think many people choose (or inevitably) to become one or the other. I do not want to make that choice; I would like to be both. I am not sure it's possible, but I can try, can't I?

*Zarina Geloo is the owner and editor of the Guardian Weekly in Zambia.*



## **At the Heart of Change: The Role of Communication in Sustainable Development**

By Kitty Warnock

**P**anos London's *At the Heart of Change: The Role of Communication in Sustainable Development 2007* is a call to development thinkers and planners to put communication at the centre of all development thinking - with more resources, planning, and expertise. Panos London believes that flows of communication, or lack of them, can make the difference between success and failure in achieving development goals. Readers of *The Drum Beat* probably agree - but top-level political and development leaders continue to neglect communication. In this piece, I ask you: What can we as the communication for development community do to put communication where it belongs, at the centre of development thinking? What are the obstacles, and what are the opportunities, as you see them in your own work?

### **What is the Challenge?**

Communication is central to all aspects of development, and development initiatives do not succeed unless they include and are supported by communication - yet communication is often neglected or undervalued in development policy, planning, and budgets. It is introduced into programmes too little, too late, and in a fragmentary way. Panos London argues that communication needs to be included from the very start in all analysis of development problems, in the establishment of development goals and policy, in planning, and at all levels of programme implementation. Senior decision-makers in governments and development agencies should take the lead in understanding the essential role of communication and integrating it into all development initiatives.

But at present, how many international and national development pledges and plans mention communication? National Poverty Reduction Strategies, for example, rarely highlight it. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) only touch on it in passing. Top-level donor agreements such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness do not mention it, although without communication none of the declaration's aims could be achieved. In general, development plans and goals do not specify the role of communication.

Why is this? Perhaps the importance of communication is taken for granted - but that is not the way for communication to get the attention and resources it needs. Development leaders must realise that effective communication does not happen naturally. It needs to be planned and supported.

Many initiatives recently have tried to put communication in its proper place on the development map - the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the Africa Commission, the African Media Development Initiative (AMDI) and Stream, the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD), and efforts within individual agencies - emphasising different elements from the menu of 'Communication for Development'. But we are still waiting for a clear commitment to communication from top-level development actors, global and national. Panos London has drawn together the arguments made in these previous initiatives into a single framing vision of how all types of communication are essential for addressing all of today's development concerns - and to identify clearly what different

development actors can do to strengthen communication. This is the purpose of Panos London's two publications: *At the heart of change*, and its companion *The case for communication*, which lays out the arguments more fully.

### **The Argument (I): Why Communication is at the Centre of Development**

Communication is a defining human characteristic and a central element in the functioning of all societies; it is a goal in itself, as well as an enabler of development. Panos London's definition of 'communication for development' includes all channels - broadcast and print, telephones and digital, face-to-face - and all types of communication from planned information campaigns to informal interpersonal dialogue, from knowledge management to entertainment. Effective communication processes are two-way - they involve both listening and speaking.

Many current analyses and strategic approaches to development require communication as an integral element. Good governance, direct budget support, aid coherence, human rights, gender equity, equitable economic growth, livelihoods, the MDGs - all of these approaches involve building people's capacities to participate in development, make their voices heard and hold governments accountable. In other words, they depend on communication - though this is rarely spelled out.

For example, good governance - itself a goal as well as an enabler of other aspects of development - depends on many different types of communication. It enables peace, democracy, social and political inclusion, participation, accountability, effective and efficient delivery of services, and economic activities. Some of the many areas of communication needed to sustain good governance are:

- Independent and quality media to foster political processes, host public debate and hold governments and other institutions accountable;
- Laws, systems and capacity for transparency,

monitoring and accountability of government by parliament and citizens;

- Dialogue and information sharing within government, to ensure coherence between departments;
- Communication systems to facilitate administrative relations between government and citizens, and citizens' access to these;
- Information management for effective and responsive delivery of public services; and
- Dialogue and networking among civil society, to enable solution of problems, formulation of needs, and participation in political and development processes.

For another illustration of how all types of communication should be considered together in planning for development, take one of the MDGs, improving maternal health. Addressing this challenge needs actions at many levels, all of which entail particular types of communication. The following is just a sample:

- Changing social/cultural attitudes to women and to reproductive health - with mass media including entertainment as partners
- Changing the status and power of women within families - through community discussions, mass media, and education
- National policy and strategy choices - involving debate of different options between government, parliament, experts, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the public, through media and other channels as well as political processes
- Provision of services - using information and communication technology (ICT) for managing resources and linking the field-level to the centre, developing transparency processes for reducing corruption, and drawing on many different media for training of personnel
- Ensuring take-up of services - getting information to potential users through mass media and other channels.

Neglecting any one of these areas of communication could jeopardise the success of government or non-governmental organisation (NGO) initiatives to reduce maternal mortality.

## The Argument (II) - Why Communication Needs Support from Development Organisations

*At the heart of change* highlights why communication cannot be left to look after itself but, rather, needs support from development organisations. One broad area to consider is that governments and traditional media need support as they struggle to keep up with the rapidly evolving challenges of new communication technologies. For governments, these ICTs are revolutionising their relations with their citizens; for media, the challenge is to redefine the role of professional journalism within the plethora of unmediated individual voices in the blogosphere.



Media has a role to play in development, interview of market manager during Business Unusual, Tanzania. *Credit: Trevor Davies*

Another broad area for development intervention is the need to ensure that the poor are included in flows of communication and enabled to participate in development processes. The huge surge in the amount and accessibility of communication and media in recent years has been mostly market-driven, and the market is not the best means of meeting the needs of poor and marginalised people. Panos London argues that communication and media should be seen as public goods: everybody gains from their healthy presence, but the investments needed to provide them universally may not be profitable enough to attract private investors.

Development support may be direct financial support, or policy direction and regulation - for instance, a frequency allocation policy that ensures bandwidth is available for community radio stations - or indirect support such as providing electricity to rural areas.

Technology is certainly spreading rapidly - the boom in

mobile phones in Africa and India is evidence that technologies can spread through unaided market mechanisms - but the market alone may not reach the poorest, and may contribute to widening gaps between poor and rich. For development goals, governments may need to intervene in markets - for instance to ensure telephony reaches remote areas, or to ensure the smallest businesses can benefit from the internet. International ICT infrastructure may need support, as the costs and difficulties of bringing together large numbers of stakeholders to negotiate complex agreements are beyond the scope of individual investors.

Mass media have also blossomed since democratisation in the 1990s, but they face huge challenges, in rich as well as poor countries. Independent, critical, credible, pluralistic media are essential for good governance, accountability and public debate. But this kind of high quality public service journalism is expensive, and threatened by the pressures of survival in a competitive market. Regarding media as a public good opens the way for governments and development agencies to provide support. Non-profitable media such as community radio stations may also need support, and small media outlets may need protection against the consolidating tendencies of the market.

### What Panos London is Calling For

Our agenda for action calls for governments, national and international civil society organisations, development organisations and donors to work together to:

- Build more open, transparent information and communication systems and political cultures;
- Treat information, communication and the media as "public goods" and invest accordingly;
- Take a holistic view of communication processes and integrate communications into development planning and implementation; and
- Invest in media development.

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## Diverse Voices: Media Access and Participation of Marginalised Communities

By Deborah Walter

### Abstract

Strategies to increase access and participation of marginalised communities in media are part of poverty reduction and addressing human rights and health issues. This may include training media to be more aware of diverse voices, as well as working with communities to create participatory media products. Such strategies can result in new and interesting perspectives on news and current events, as well as opportunities for diverse voices to speak out on issues that affect them.

### Key words

media, participation, gender, HIV/AIDS, migration

## Social Exclusion and participation

Research suggests that social exclusion and the resulting lack of opportunities are major causes of perpetuating poverty and violations of human rights. As the 2005 Commission for Africa Report indicates, "Even within poor countries, the poorest people are those who are excluded from information, from government services, from full participation in society, politics and the economy and even informal community support systems. All too often, the reason for the exclusion is discrimination, for example against women, disabled persons, ethnic or linguistic minorities, or persons with HIV or AIDS. Exclusion makes it especially difficult to escape from poverty.." (Commission for Africa 2005). Social exclusion, whether based on race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, caste, age or sexuality, is important because it denies certain groups of people opportunities to

participate equally in society, and this is a major cause of poverty and insecurity. (DFID 2005)

Media is an important part of this social fabric. Media not only reflects and reports on society, but also shapes public opinions and perceptions. Media that perpetuates stereotypes about certain communities can exacerbate discrimination and social exclusion. When it comes to media, social exclusion means a lack of opportunities to have one's voice heard and be able to play a role in advocating on issues that affect them. For the most part socially excluded communities and individuals are also the same who are most vulnerable – migrants, children and youth, women (especially economically poor and rural women), people living with HIV, among many others.

Exclusion from the media takes on many forms. It is both



about how mainstream media does not access diverse voices when it comes to covering news and current events, which results in some issues not been covered at all, or being covered poorly. It is also about the lack of skills and capacity of individuals, non-journalists from these communities, to engage with media both in creating their own media products and in responding to media.

### **Lack of diverse voices**

Across a broad spectrum of communities and issues, it is apparent that there is a small minority that are seen and heard in print, radio, and television, and who are involved in the creation of media.

Research indicates media under-presents women's voices in Africa. Across the 12 countries of the Southern African region, women constitute just 17% of news sources. Women constitute just 19% of news sources in South Africa and black women, who constitute 41% of the population, account for a mere 7% of news sources. (Gender Links and Media Institute of Southern Africa 2003).

Likewise, persons with disabilities do not regularly feature in the media, and media rarely portrays them as persons with opinions on news and topical issues. When they are interviewed, it is mostly on disability issues. Alternatively, they will be talked about with pity, or with astonishment because they have managed to do something brave "in spite" of their disabilities. The disability is usually the focus of the report when an individual that has a disability appears in the public media. (The Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2008, 2)

While media may lack certain voices, it can also actually be perpetuate discrimination and stereotypes by the voices that it sometimes allows. The South African print and broadcast media reflect many stereotypes of foreign migrants. Research suggests that the media contributes to xenophobia when it supports negative public perceptions of migrants, particularly African migrants, as illegal, criminal and threats to social and economic prosperity, or carriers of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The

Media Monitoring Project (2003) comments on these stereotypical representations in its research report on Xenophobia in the media :

...there is no doubt that public attitudes have been formed by highly emotional media images that portray South Africa as "flooded" or "overrun" by undocumented migrants from the rest of Africa.

### **Challenges for media**

Reporting on such a diversity of complex issues poses many challenges for newsrooms. Looking at a the broad scope of reporting on human rights, health and poverty-related issues, the structural problems of media finance affect working journalists, who are often under-skilled, under-trained, poorly paid and precariously employed. Time and resources may not be available to fund the research needed for stories on poverty reduction, especially ones informed by poor people's views. In turn, journalists may lack the knowledge and practical skills to gather and decipher the growing range of information and analysis (Wood & Barnes 2007).

For example, in the case of South Africa, one issue is that the juniorisation of newsrooms and a lack of skilled staff and adequate resources have resulted in an increase in the number of incidents of poor reporting related to migration. Coverage of key social issues such as the representation of race, racial stereotyping, xenophobia and racism, is often of limited value, as it often fails to explore pertinent aspects in any depth (Mtwana and Bird 2006).

Largely journalists continue to rely on "official" sources, often not accessing the very people that an issue most affects. As studies of media environments and HIV/AIDS reporting in Southern Africa have shown, the key to effective reporting on the epidemic is a vibrant, free and diverse media environment. Yet, at present, HIV/AIDS is still predominantly reported in a retro/ reactive way, as a one-dimensional health issue and on the basis of solely government sources of information, rather than, for example, the "real life" voices of those who are most vulnerable to and/or affected by the epidemic (Panos 2005).



In research conducted by Panos London on media and HIV in Southern Africa, the government, particularly the Ministry of Health, was the dominant source of information about HIV/AIDS used by and reported in the media. In countries such as Swaziland and Zimbabwe, this was linked to a restrictive media environment and limited capacity of the sector to criticise official policies and practices. In all of the countries, it was also linked to a lack of analytical training and investigative skills among journalists. In reality, stories with a government or medical source were more likely to be used than ones that came from, for example, a community member. For journalists with little time and/or limited training, getting an article from an official source was seen as much "safer" than validating and following up on an unofficial perspective (Panos 2005).

Another reason for reports that may perpetuate discrimination is the increasingly sensationalised reporting on sensitive issues associated with the growing tabloidisation of the media in Southern Africa. Out of 182 newspapers in 10 countries, 27 (or 15%) are regarded by media analysts in those countries as tabloid both in form and content. These are characterised by sensation with stories told in a melodramatic and breathless tone. These papers are growing in popularity, even despite the fact that audiences are aware that tabloids do not always tell the truth. When asked to select from a long list of what they dislike about tabloids, 52% women and 50% men said they do not always tell the truth (Lowe Morna and Ndlovu 2008).

This tabloidisation is also spilling over into mainstream media. All newspapers tend to lead with dramatic headlines that may sell more publications, but often trivialise the issues at stake and promote stereotypes and discrimination, which reinforces the alienation of specific groups of people (Mtwana and Bird 2006).

### **The case for practical media training**

Journalists who report on social and human rights issues often grapple with the tension between

commitment to impartiality, bias, and activist reporting. However, given the lack of capacity and knowledge in newsrooms on such a diverse range of issues, it makes sense that those who are competent and well-placed to conduct training on issues such as gender, human rights, the environment, etc., should do so. In doing so, this is not a call for journalists to become "activists" but rather opening new perceptions and creating better balanced coverage.

Issue-based training that includes a practical component offers journalists an opportunity to expand their skills in short-term sessions that impart knowledge, encourage new perspectives, and also put journalists in touch with those that they may not normally interview. Along with building skills and sensitising media about these issues, this strategy actually encourages journalists to interact with these communities, hopefully breaking down barriers that will increase the likelihood that they will seek out more diverse sources when reporting.

#### *Business Unusual*

This training, based on training material developed by Gender Links in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Netherlands Institute of Southern Africa (NIZA) covers a broad spectrum of gender and economic concerns, including gender and the macroeconomic environment, development, planning budgets, work, trade, enterprise and globalisation. Exposing business and economic reporters to key decision makers and entrepreneurs, the course includes the production of a supplement that generally is included in a local newspaper, and opportunity for participants to write for the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service, as well as enter stories for the Gender and Media awards. Run by GL in collaboration with media training institutions in Southern African countries, the *Business Unusual* course offers journalists an opportunity to view business and the economy through a gender lens, often resulting in new and unheard stories. Some of these stories are also offered through the GL Commentary Service, and

the fact that they get picked up by editors throughout the region for re-publications is a testament to how

these new perspectives are well received by editors and readers. The article below is just one example.

# Call for paternity leave for fathers

## ... as fight for gender equality ignores rights of men

By Lorato Bailang, Bothe Moseki, Thato Enosa and Bathami Chilume

Many people often complain about men who do not take responsibility for their children.

Yet the fight for gender equality and parental rights has largely ignored the other side of the equation, men who are denied the right to equal time and access to their children. Responsibilities and rights go hand in hand.

The Employment Act in Botswana makes provision for maternity leave, but is silent on the issue of paternity leave. Of late men in the country are demanding change. Parental leave is the right to take time off work to care for one's child or make welfare arrangements for the child.

Ideally, this includes maternity leave for mothers and paternity leave for fathers. There are two parents for every child, and in a changing world where both partners are likely to have a job, paternal leave ought to be considered.

President for Tertiary and Allied Workers Union (TAWU) Allan Keitseng says they have had discussions aimed at drafting new public service laws which will have a provision for paternity leave. He said the government is hesitant in such issues despite being the biggest employer in the country. Workers at shop level (not in top positions) are not aware that they can demand paternity leave as the leadership is not sensitising them about it since they believe it's an unnecessary luxury.

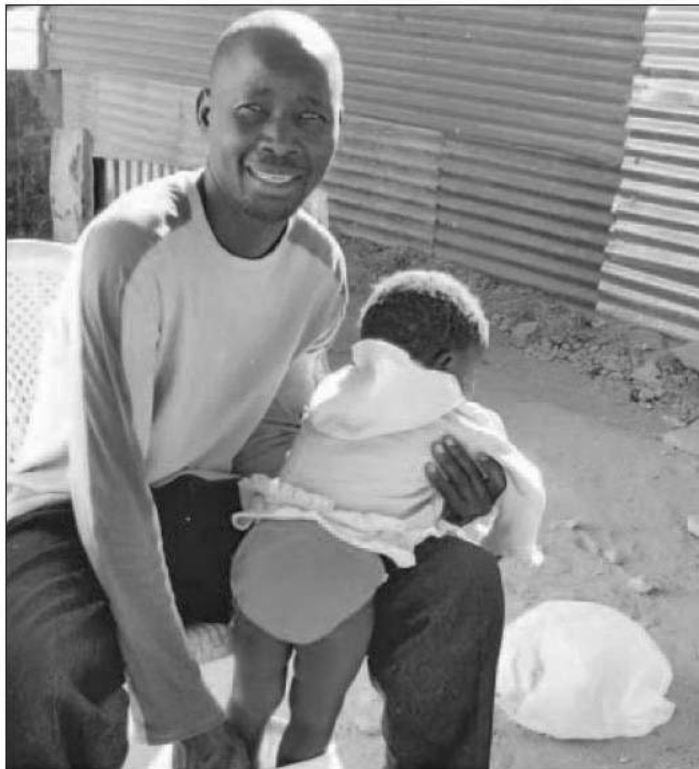
Some women also oppose paternity leave on the basis that men are not competent to care for children. Marang Morakaladi says she does not see the need for paternity leave as, "no man would do a good job like a mother would and no woman would feel at ease having left a man in charge of the baby."

Morakaladi concedes that some men can be good caretakers but argues that mothers are at an advantage due to "a mother's instincts." She says this is not a stereotype: "it's just being realistic."

Tshepo Kwapa, Founder of Voice of Men, an organisation that fights for men's rights to their children, supports the need for paternity leave. He believes men and women should have equal rights when it comes to being involved in their children's lives as currently the law only favours women over men.

Having looked after his seven months old baby for a month all alone, Kwapa knows that given the chance men can also look after babies equally well. With the advent of disposable nappies, ready-made baby foods, washing machines and feeding bottles things have been made easier for men too.

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More and more fathers are sharing the care of infants, and need leave as much as their wives.

Produced during Business Unusual Botswana, published in The Southern Times 24 February — 2 March 2008

### Reporting Women's Legal Rights

Piloted in December 2007 in Maputo, Mozambique by CMFD (Community Media for Development) Productions, for Konrad Adenaur Stiftung the aim of this one-week course is to build the capacity of women radio journalists to investigate and report on women's rights within legal frameworks. This activity is particularly timely as there is an ongoing campaign to popularise the Africa Union

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and in August 2008 the SADC Heads of State will once again be called on review the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. At the time of the workshop, Mozambique was also considering a domestic violence law. Working with 8 radio journalists, the training included discussion on national and international commitments and related

women's rights issues as a way of holding leaders accountable. The training combines knowledge and capacity building with producing content. In this way, journalists are able to immediately put what they are learning into practice, and tangible outputs are created. The strength of this workshop is that it focused on reporting legal rights from the perspective of government commitments. Political reporting often tends to neglect women's rights issues, and as such this training aimed to strengthen and provide a new perspective on political reporting.

### Participatory Media

Along with mainstream media, participatory media is increasingly gaining recognition for increasing access to media, particularly among marginalised communities. Research and experience in the field of communication and media for development (and other sectors) suggests that participation of the people and communities that a project or programme is being designed for is considered key to the success and impact that the initiative will have. Communication and media programmes focusing on participation often attempt to address lack of access to media and lack of opportunities to communicate and advocate needs and priorities by developing strategies that work with community members to help provide opportunities for these stories, voices, and opinions to be heard. Participation and outreach to hard to reach and diverse communities can be important strategies for tackling social exclusion.

Participation is not about consultation, but rather facilitating a process that amplifies the voices that are not heard at every possible step. Participation facilitates the exercise of people's decision-making power and promotes higher levels of self-reliance. Of course, participation will vary according to the situation. In some cases, involving those affected is not possible at the beginning of a project. A step-by-step approach to participation may be more appropriate for individuals and groups historically reluctant to participate in development programmes or who mistrust "external interventions." In every case, increasing opportunities for participation by those directly affected by a problem or issue is crucial.

For example, participation in health and development communication programmes can strengthen the voice of ordinary citizens and ensure their involvement in decisions that affect them, their families, and their communities. It has been widely documented that participation can increase the impact of health and development programs and lead to long-term sustainability. Individuals and groups actively involved become committed and feel increasingly capable of improving their health and living conditions. Those directly affected by the issue addressed in a health and development program have wisdom, abilities, and experience the programme can and should build on (Tapia et al 2007).

This means that women make radio programmes for and about women; youth develop youth-oriented HIV dramas, migrant workers access media to make documentaries about their lives, etc. Access to media is a vital part of political access, because of its power as an advocacy tool, and in ensuring that elected politicians, female or male, hear about issues affecting various sectors of the population. Media can both bring issues to the forefront, and can help hold leaders accountable if they fail to adhere to commitments.

*"This workshop taught me to be responsible. It also taught me to be patient with people. When coming here I had so many unresolved issues but when interviewing some people I found I was healed. I also learned how to approach people, how to do a radio program, edit scripts, which I had no clue about."*  
- Rural Woman, South Africa  
(anonymous evaluation)

*“We have learnt how we can influence our community.”  
– participant, Kenya (anonymous evaluation)*

#### *Rural Women’s Radio*

As part of a three-part project initiated by FAHAMU Networks for Social Justice and in collaboration with local partners, CMFD worked with rural women in South Africa, Kenya, and Sierra Leone to produce radio/ podcast programmes about women’s rights, especially related to rural women. Each of the workshops was conducted in a participatory way, with the participants, who were mostly women from rural communities, identifying issues and priorities, as well as conducting interviews and producing on-site radio programmes that could be distributed to radio stations, community groups, and distributed through Pambazuka podcasts. In each of the three countries – South Africa, Kenya and Sierra Leone – women came together to participate in an 8-day workshop. Together they produced radio programming in issues as diverse as women’s inheritance rights, HIV/AIDS, early marriage, elections, and access to health care. The collective voices from the three countries show that in many cases rural women from all over the continent face the same issues when it comes to access to health and rights. Yet these programmes also very clearly show that given the opportunity everyone, even people who have never held a microphone or conducted interviews, who may not be literate, or be considered to be “experts,” have a voice and the abilities to make it heard.

Rural women are very rarely heard in the media, and even more rarely do they have the opportunity to actually create media. Using a microphone and recorder, they have the opportunity to actually ask police officers, traditional leaders, lawyers, and other community members about why they face discrimination, poverty and gross violations of their rights. This project was created to both produce programmes that actually speak to the issues that

these women face, and also empower those who participated through learning new skills and new confidence in finding a way to make their voices heard.

#### *Musicians Against Xenophobia*

South Africa, especially Johannesburg, is home to thousands of foreign Africans. Some are refugees, fleeing persecution and seeking asylum; others are looking for work and a better life. Many find that life is not what they expected. They face discrimination from government services, harassment by police and degrading treatment from people, whether in the taxis, schools, shops or streets. Initiated by CMFD and supported by MMINO, the project aimed to address xenophobia through the popular medium of music. The musicians worked together with migrants and young people to create three songs that get to the heart of the matter.



Singer Judith Mudau (bottom right) working with researchers, Cindy Dzanya (left), developing lyrics against xenophobia  
*Credit: Deborah Walter*

This is a clear example of the varied forms of participation, and how creative strategies can be employed to



create opportunities for participation, as far as possible. Quality considerations meant that professional musicians were needed to write and create music, yet participation is still a key strategy. Firstly, the musicians involved were a diverse group from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Since it was not possible for the musicians to work directly with a large group of migrants, prior to the recording session CMFD interviewed over 100 migrants and 40 South Africans in community-based surveys to better understand how people experience and perceive xenophobia. The overwhelming majority told about how they personally suffered from discrimination, including from police and health services.

These surveys were collated, and drafted into a creative brief for the musicians. Researchers, also a diverse group from South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola, were on hand to answer any questions that the musicians had and share their own experiences and what they learned during the course of the surveys. The musicians were then tasked with putting together words to give voice to these experiences.

### **Challenges to participatory media**

Participatory media has many practical challenges related to ways of involving these groups as well as a need to support special needs. Simply put, marginalised communities are sometimes hard to reach. Not accustomed to being included, they may even be suspicious of programmes. Moreover many, especially women and girls, have so many responsibilities and often rely on male decision-makers for the ability to even be involved, they can be hard to engage.

Participation of diverse communities may involve extra steps, planning, and funding, and require programme managers, funders and other stakeholders to be very flexible in their expectations. For example, for a programme to be truly participatory, a programme manager may identify rights as a topic, but what rights to be covered should be largely left to the group, along with how to approach the issue.

Participatory media can take many forms, and this is increasing with new forms of community media. This can include theatre, community radio, oral testimonies, digital stories, etc. In all of these, there must be a view to quality. However, quality becomes even more important when creating participatory media for mainstream distribution. Whether developing a special gender-related supplement for insertion in a newspaper, creating radio programmes with children, or producing documentaries by and for migrants, no media outlet will accept poor quality productions for mainstream use. Moreover, poor quality productions will not be read or listened to, and thus not serve the intended purpose.

Similarly, it must be recognised that participation must still have at its heart not only quality, but accuracy and good reporting principles. From the very outset, any programme that is considered participatory must make it clear to all parties that the production of a participatory media product is a collaboration between those who have the technical knowledge and those who have the on-the-ground expertise and the responsibility of making change (both equally important.) For example, poor quality information about HIV or gender stereotyping should never be allowed to enter into a radio programme because it is “participatory.” Likewise, if you are producing a radio programme that will go on air, a sound engineer will need to assist participants until they have gained the requisite skills. What is most important is that at every stage, participants are actively involved as much as possible, and facilitators with the technical expertise are clear that their role is to amplify the voices of participants.

### **Conclusion**

It is clearly evident that media and communities would benefit from increased interaction, and that this is good journalism. Though some may argue that when NGOs and social movements engage with media it results in a biased agenda, evidence shows that media is missing the mark when it comes to many communities and issues. Given this, and the under-resourced nature of many news-rooms, it

then makes sense that media and NGOs “partner” in terms of mutual learning. As well, media itself can benefit from greater diversity of voices.

This can take the form of training, and working with organisations who are creating participatory media. Since it is unlikely that media houses will begin participatory processes, this is another area for a partnership of sorts. None of this needs to impact on media impartiality, but rather create new perspectives and stories that better represent the population as a whole.

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#### Writers Bio

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