

EDITORIAL**Janine Moolman**

This inaugural issue of the *Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal* is published at a time in which media the world over are debating the outcry over the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed which first appeared in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*.

The controversy has raised critical issues for media. Most importantly however, the lesson to be taken from these events is that with media freedom comes responsibility. This responsibility includes being respectful of diversity - of faith, language, race, ability, social status and so forth - that defines the globalised world in which we live today.

This respect for diversity, however, should not only be reflected in media content, rather it should extend to ownership, policies and laws, media practice, employment, education and training, and the regulatory framework that governs media practice.

Media coverage in Southern Africa is seen as being single sourced and event driven; based on an hierarchical news structure which privileges particular dominant voices over others that have less power and as such, less voice. This has resulted in the absence of a diversity of voices and representation of people who consume media. A further consequence is the weakness of contextual and analytical reporting. The absence of a diverse media that is representative of the interests and concerns of all citizens is a threat to the regions' democracy and citizen's ability to participate in democratic processes.

The Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal is a direct response to these concerns and as such exists to promote a deepening of media diversity in the Southern Africa region. The journal fills a critical gap between media theory and practice as it publishes analytical and reflective content on media practice for those involved in media – as news producers, news consumers and news shapers. It creates the space for critical reflection, debate, criticism and arguments for media diversity in Southern Africa. Underpinning the journal is the idea that knowledge is produced in multiple sites and that good media practice reflects this in content, policy, training, research and ownership.

The journal is the product of a partnership between Gender Links and the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network. Indeed, the majority of contributors to this issue are GEMSA members. This issue of the *Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal* has been made possible through the financial assistance of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).



The inaugural issue of the bi-annual journal explores media diversity from a gender perspective. Timed to coincide with the release of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2005, the journal offers readers views, research and analysis on gender and the media in Southern Africa.

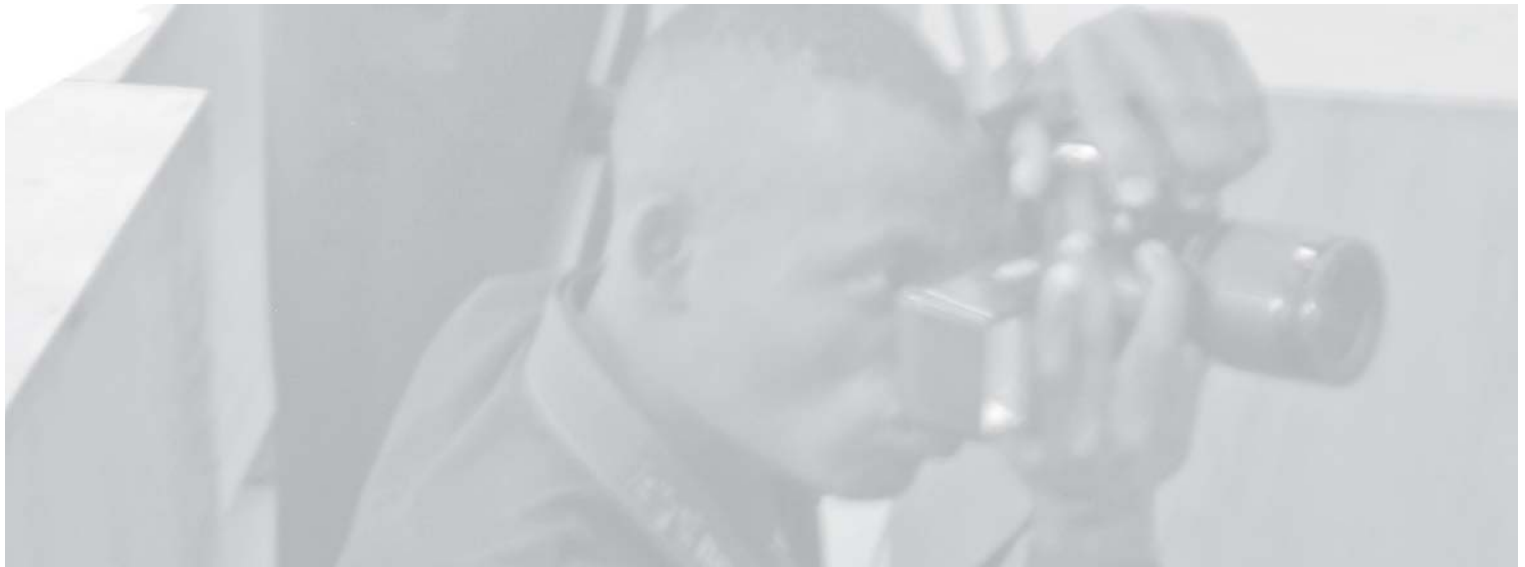
The journal takes its cue from the results of the GMMP which finds that a decade after the first global monitoring took place, not much has changed in the way in which women are represented in the news – as subjects, sources or producers.

In her contribution Anna Turley shares the highlights of the study and argues for a wide scale social and political transformation in which women's communication rights are understood, valued and respected. Benchmarking the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) conducted by Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) against the findings of the GMMP 2005, Colleen Lowe Morna writes that while Southern Africa has made significant progress towards achieving greater gender balance in the news and in newsrooms, it is still far from achieving equality by any of the measures used in the GMMP. One of the key findings of the Southern Africa analysis is that women are still most likely to be approached as news sources in their personal rather than in their professional capacity.

Does this reflect a respect for diversity? How can it, when half of the world's population, as Christine Davis writes, are unable to relate to the images of themselves they consume through the media. She writes that women need to use their power as consumers of media to demand a more diverse representation of themselves.

Supporting this argument, the findings of the Gender and Media Audience Study (GMAS), outlined in an article by Agnes NM Odhiambo, show that women and men in Southern Africa are looking for more diversity in the news they consume. They want more local content, human interest stories and women and men to be portrayed in more diverse ways. What the findings are telling media owners and producers is that media diversity is good for business.

In her contribution, Rosemary Okello, writes that African editors are embracing diversity and want to reflect "the continent in its totality". Reporting on the recent African Editors Forum conference, Okello argues that reflecting Africa's story in its totality implies the telling of women's stories.



Crystal Orderson analyses the representation of black women in the popular soap operas *Generations* and *Isidingo* (which are screened in most Southern African countries). She writes that black women being portrayed as women with voices and opinions who are able to make decisions – a definite departure from representations of black women as powerless victims without agency. However, she cautions against the entrenching of a new set of stereotypes.

Media activism needs to be intensified if any meaningful shift in the representation of women in the media is to be achieved. This was one of the findings of the GMMP. In a groundbreaking study of women's media activism across the globe, Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross present the findings of a study which found that women media activists followed very specific strategies in their media activism. The article presents the Model of Women's Media Activism which the authors hope will encourage others to extend and refine their qualitative and quantitative work in order to develop clearer understandings of the role of women's media activism in social change both within and across nations.

Recognising the critical role media advocacy plays in deepening diversity, the journal includes a specific section on this subject. In this issue, an overview of the successful strategies employed to influence the South African media agenda during the 16 Days of Activism on Gender Violence are discussed as well as an article on an ongoing campaign to rid Mauritius of sexist advertisements.

In the policy section, Patricia Made shows the potential that policies have for promoting diversity in media in Southern Africa. She cautions, however, that in order for policy to move beyond paper, and for it to be seen as a credible process by all staff, commitment from the highest level is essential. Rene Smith and Davison Mudzingwa shed light on the policy environment within South Africa and Zimbabwe and show how the legislative framework governing media in these countries impacts on media diversity. Making the link between sexual violence and media policies, Loveness Jambaya investigates sexual harassment policies in Zimbabwean newsrooms and argues that sexual harassment of women journalists works against media diversity.

Ruth Ayisi, coordinator of the Southern African Media Trainers Network (SAMTRAN) shares her vision for reviving the network in her contribution to the training and education section. Jeanne Prinsloo's article shares the



rationale behind the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Information 21 Project's draft curriculum that focuses on coverage of regional development and integration.

Diversity is also critical for new media. In the information and technology section, Brenda Zulu illustrates this as she reports on the disappointing outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society world conference held in Tunis which she, argues fell far short of the expectations of gender activists. Chris Kabwato and Vanessa Malila report on a Highway Africa training workshop that has equipped journalists with practical and conceptual skills on reporting on the information society.

The *Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal* puts the spotlight on media diversity in the region. We hope that this and future issues stimulate debate and discussion to contribute towards building and strengthening the dynamic media in Southern Africa.

The second issue of the journal will be published prior to the second Southern Africa Gender and Media Summit taking place in Johannesburg from 6-8 September. The Summit is taking place under the theme "Media diversity: good for democracy, good for business." This is also the theme for the next issue of the journal and we invite potential contributors to send us ideas and contributions that fall within this theme.

We thank UNESCO for making the publication of this issue of the journal possible and hope that other partners will join us in this important project.

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