

# Write about rights

While GL's primary mission is to encourage the mainstream media to produce more gender aware stories rather than produce alternative publications, this can be boosted by opinion pieces, supplements, and magazines produced as part of GL's training and networking efforts.

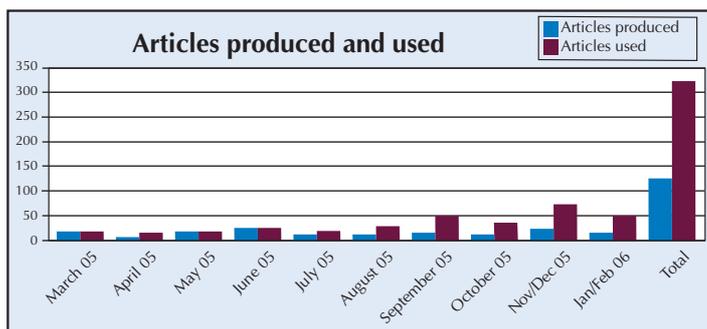
Under the slogan "fresh views on every day news", GL runs an Opinion and Commentary Service that provides an average of ten provocative articles each month from activists and opinion shapers around Southern Africa to the mainstream media on gender issues. The "I" Stories, a special brand of the Opinion and Commentary Service that features first hand accounts continues to do well. Stories from the service are regularly packaged in different ways as part of special projects. Recently GL launched the first issue of the Media Diversity Journal that will provide an avenue for more reflective and analytical writing on gender and media work.

## Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service

In an effort to ensure that the service becomes more professional and better managed, GL last year introduced a number of tracking mechanisms that we report and comment on this year.

### Output and usage

The graph compares the number of articles produced versus those used. It shows that in total, GL produced 126 articles over the year under review, compared to a target of 120. On average, these were used 2.6 times, well ahead of the targeted 1.5. The fact that there is a steady increase in the number of times articles used is significant, as it shows that the service is making headway in the mainstream media. It should also be emphasised that these figures are based on what GL is able to track. GL does not have the budget to systematically track all media.



The figures also demonstrate that highest usage coincides with special projects being undertaken by Gender Links and its partners. For example, the 53 clips in September were linked to a project on the Millennium Development Summit which generated interest from around the world and had great regional interest as well. Articles addressed gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including both "expert" writers and personal "testimony" articles to give life to the theoretical analysis provided by the experts. Similarly, the 67 clips in November/December linked to the 16 Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign which took place throughout the region. Again both "expert" and

"testimony" articles generated considerable media pick up.

Unfortunately the series on local councillors speaking out did not generate as much interest as the MDG and gender violence campaign projects. This may be because the content was very specific to Johannesburg. Similar series in future may need to be conceptualised in a broader framework.

On the whole, the GL Opinion and Commentary Service certainly has grown exponentially over the last year. Of the 31 articles produced from June to December 2004, 19 were used. In the same period in 2006, the service generated 89 articles and 229 clips.

This growth can be attributed to:

- The presence of a dedicated editor for the GL Opinion and Commentary Service.
- Strengthened relationships with marketers and editors in the region, particularly in South Africa where the Service editor is based.
- More awareness of the kind of content that has regional appeal.
- Producing content that is topical and current.
- The awareness in the region of the GL Service as a space where writers can submit their work and get exposure that has resulted in an increase in the number of writers to the service.

### Contributors

The table below shows the location of writers per country. The majority of writers are from South Africa, followed by Zimbabwe and then Mauritius. This can be explained by the location of the GL Service Editor in South Africa, the presence of more English language writers with an interest in gender and the confidence to write in the country as well as the fact that the service is perhaps more widely known in the country.

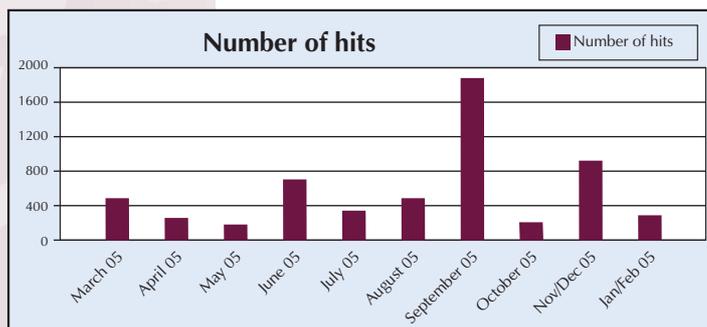
More effort needs to be put into encouraging more writers from countries in the region. This will help raise levels of awareness of gender through the media in different countries, as well as strengthen and develop the writing skills and capacity of writers within these countries to articulate gender concerns in the public space.

Country	Number of writers
Lesotho	4
Malawi	4
Mauritius	7
Mozambique	1
Namibia	6
South Africa	79
Swazilan	3
Tanzania	3
Zambia	5
Zimbabwe	14
Africa-outsideSADC	9
International	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>

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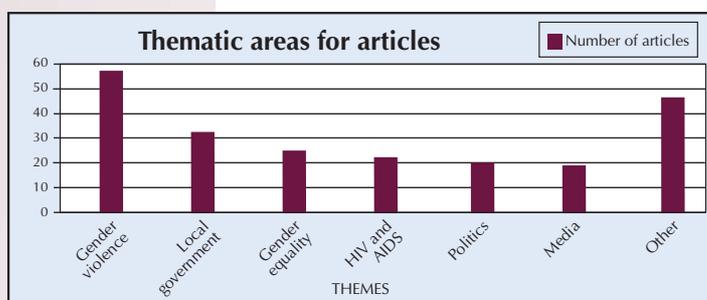
### Website hits

The GL Opinion and Commentary service received a total of 6095 hits during the year. This peaked during the months of September and again during November/December due to the production of articles as part of the MDGs project and gender violence campaign. However, it is interesting to note that articles continue to be accessed throughout the year – often long after they have been sent out through the service. Articles can be searched in a variety of ways including: by author, country, theme and date.



### Thematic areas of interest

The graph below shows that gender violence continues to dominate coverage by the service. However, it is encouraging to see other topics, such as local government and HIV and AIDS, featuring quite prominently. In future there is scope for diversifying the topics even further.



### Next steps

In the latter part of this year, the service has begun discussions and research into developing revenue generation strategies to make the GL service sustainable. Exciting new possibilities also exist for developing radio commentary pieces and disseminating these over the Internet.

## Gender Violence Barometer

This is a monthly E newsletter that tracks progress in introducing laws, services and public awareness campaigns for ending gender violence, based on the gaps identified in the audits conducted by GL and GEMSA. The barometer has an important role to play in tacking progress in the National Action Plans being developed in various Southern African countries. The targets include: policy makers, service providers, activists and advocacy groups as well the media.

## Media diversity journal

Despite its purported role in “giving voice to the voiceless”, the media worldwide is heavily biased towards covering the views of those in power, an elite group often defined according to race, ethnicity, class and gender.

In Southern Africa, where democracy is a relatively new and fragile phenomenon, the media is still largely state dominated. The concept of a public media is weak. Albeit to different degrees, private and community media face political, organisational and financial challenges. Overall, whether in the public or private sphere, media ownership is concentrated in a few hands.



Seeking out new voices in Mauritius

The upshot is weak analytical and contextual reporting based on events and single sources: often officials and experts. As the Gender and Media Audience Study (GMAS 2004/2005) that focused on consumer responses showed, male and female audiences yearn for more positive news; greater local content and greater diversity in the representation and portrayal of women and men than what is being offered by the mainstream media.

The fact that the views of audiences are so seldom consulted flies in the face of a central tenant of democracy: citizenship participation. Failure to understand and respond to audiences in all their diversity is also bad for business.

In March 2006, GL and GEMSA launched a new Media Diversity Journal that aims to:

- Develop and share a body of knowledge on media diversity in Southern Africa.
- Promote more probing, analytical and contextual journalism.
- Share best practices on how to achieve greater diversity in media content, ownership and market share.
- Contribute to greater media literacy and responsiveness among ordinary citizens- women and men- in Southern Africa.

Content for each issue is decided by an editorial advisory committee consisting of the policy and training committees of GEMSA as well as GEMSA members with expertise, knowledge and networks in this field.

The Southern Africa Media Diversity Journal targets media workers and owners, policy-makers, researchers, lecturers, student journalists, activists and those individuals and organisations working towards media diversity in the region. Contributions are invited and solicited from groups and individuals such as these and commissioned by the editor. The next issue will document best practices presented at the second Gender and Media Summit in September 2004.