

Write about rights

By Debbie Walter



The GL Opinion and Commentary Service, supported by Hivos, and disseminated through our list serve, continues to grow from strength to strength. This service aims to link activists and the media through a regular flow of articles on topical issues- “fresh views on every day news” – targeted at the leader pages of newspapers, where women’s voices and gender issues are

especially scarce. While we seek out the views of well known names, part of our mission is to grow and develop new writers and voices. The service thus has a strong coaching, mentoring and capacity building dimension.

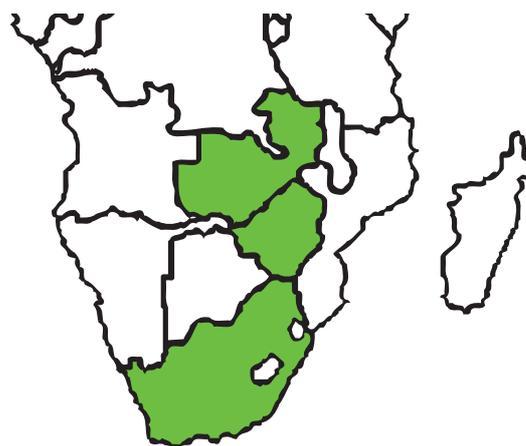
Outputs and outcomes

Number of stories: During the year under review, we produced 103 stories, or an average of 8.5 articles a month. This is slightly lower than the previous year in which we produced 126 articles; or an average of just over ten stories per month. This is partly explained by a change in staff post and the fact that the new editor is part time. However, with 326 clippings (representing known usage) the average usage of stories went up from 2.6 to three (see table). This means that on average every article produced is used three times by the mainstream media.

GL Service articles produced and published			
Month	No produced	No of clippings	Average use
Mar-06	7	19	2.7
Apr-06	1	4	4.0
May-06	8	39	4.9
Jun-06	4	18	4.5
Jul-06	7	27	3.9
Aug-06	16	28	1.8
Sep-06	10	30	3.0
Oct-06	6	23	3.8
Nov-06	21	61	2.9
Dec-06	12	26	2.2
Jan-06	5	14	2.8
Feb-06	6	20	3.3
Total 2007	103	309	3.0
Last year	126	326	2.6

There is ongoing learning within the Service to identify which types of articles will appeal to editors. In some instances, articles are used as many as 10 times, and some times they are not used at all. Larger number of produced and

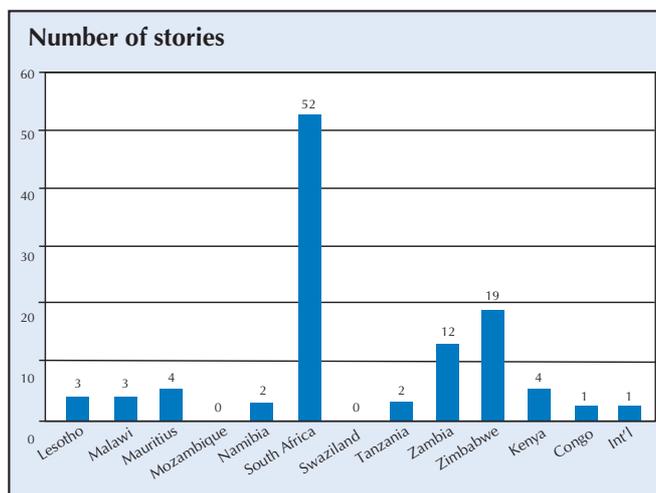
published articles tend to occur coincide with special projects being undertaken by Gender Links such as the Sixteen Days of Activism. Although at 2.2 the average use of articles during the Sixteen Days was fairly low, all articles were published at least once. In South Africa, the fact that many newspapers demand exclusivity limits the number of times articles can be published.



Country focus of stories:

The graph shows that majority of stories are from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. More effort needs to be placed into encouraging writers from different countries, as well as writers who are well – placed to write from a regional perspective.

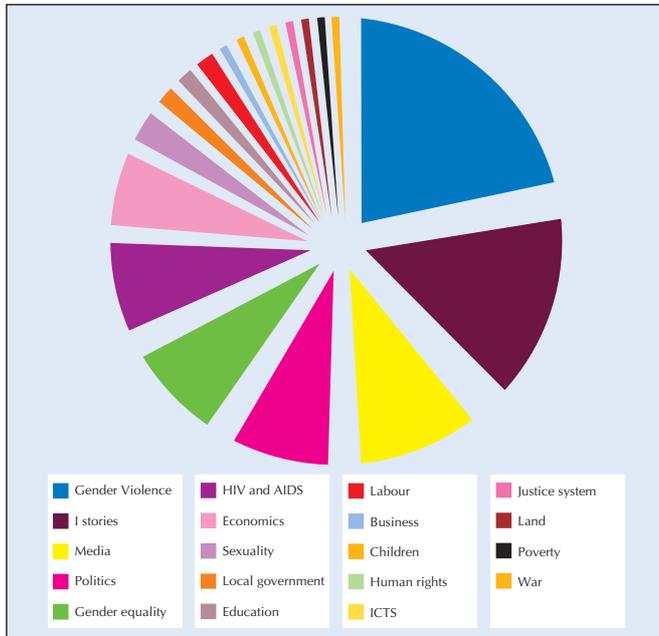
Country origin of articles



New Writers and experienced writers: Of the 103 contributors, 47 were new. This shows that GL has succeeded in getting old and new voices. Writers state that writing for the service gives them a chance to write about gender issues, to build their skills and confidence, their CVS and clip portfolio, and to extend their work beyond their own borders (see accompanying box). Unlike most news services, the GL Service editor often has ongoing communication with writers to shape an article.

Write about rights

Thematic areas of interest: The graph shows that although the majority of articles were on gender violence, there is a wide variety of topics covered. In addition many articles cover more than one issue. Our data base unfortunately requires that we choose one main theme per article.



Website: Each article published through the GL service is posted on the website where it can be freely viewed. Articles can be searched in a variety of ways including: by author, country, theme and date. During the year under review, the commentary section of the website received a total of 7252 hits. It is interesting to note that articles continue to be accessed via the website long after they are used in media. For example, as of March 2007, the article "Gender gap in the Southern Africa media are slowing closing" first published on 28 February 2006, had been accessed twice that day, five times in that month, and a total of 1514 times over the last year.

Next Steps

- **Improving tracking:** In order to get a better idea of how our articles are being used, we have begun to develop an online tracking system. This will become operational in 2007.
- **Income generation for sustainability:** GL has completed a small survey of editors and are currently working on developing a strategic proposal for a way forward to develop income strategies for the service.
- **Marketing:** Awareness about the service is being increased through collaboration with the MAP project and production of a brochure as well, a four-minute digital movie.
- **Moving into radio:** GL developed radio content for the service for the first time during the Gender and Media Summit and the "I" stories. This requires more exploration and fine tuning over the coming year.
- **Timeliness:** Priority must be given to timely pieces that are relevant to what is in the news.
- **Regional scope:** While this is ideal, yet editors tend to be most interested in news from their own country. We must continue to strike a balance between national and regional concerns.

Feedback on the GL Service

From editors

"Gender Links has amplified issues of gender in Southern Africa and put an entirely new complexion and depth to the discourse of gender. For us at the *Southern Times* who have devoted a whole page each week to reporting on gender for over a year now, the timely, bright, tight and right articles from your contributors have been very useful."

Moses Magadza, Founding Editor, The Southern Times, Namibia

"Gender Links' copy has enabled us to portray and celebrate the role of women in a considered approach. We hope they will continue to fulfill this important function and provide a refreshing perspective to the portrayal of women in our publication."

- Davison S Maruziva, Editor, the Standard, Zimbabwe.

From writers

"Writing for the GL service has provided me a platform to write about gender, a thing that I have always wanted to do. As I write articles for the service, I do not have fear of being questioned as to why I write on issues affecting women on grounds that I am a woman. The service gives me confidence as a journalist that my work is good enough to be used by international media houses. It is also helping me build my CV and enhance my writing skills."

- Perpertual Sichikwenkwe, Zambia

"The response I have got from my article on the Opinion and Commentary Service has been so overwhelming that it inspired me to think about the next story idea on gender relations and inequalities. As a young writer, the service has been very helpful in guiding me, shaping my ideas without changing my thoughts and perceptions. As a survivor of gender violence, it has also been a therapeutic exercise. It has been great writing for the service because it meant my audience extended beyond Lesotho borders."

- Teboho Senthebane, Lesotho

From readers

Responding to an article on cell phones and gender relations:

"This article touched on a sore point for me. A very dear friend was killed by her husband over two years ago for a message that the husband saw on her cell phone, for which he accused her of cheating on him. He took the message out of context and for the first time in their 10-year marriage, lifted his hand on her and ended up killing her a few weeks later. I would like to applaud you for raising these issues, as they are indeed real and talking about them can only make things better. If it saves even one woman, you would've done a great job."

- Vuyiswa

General: "I think opinions of all women should be considered, not only opinions of educated and businesswomen. Women should also criticise themselves where they have shortcomings and recognise efforts by men who believe in the power of women. Men and women have their strengths and weaknesses. The issue is to focus on how to convert the weaknesses of both men and women into strengths."

- Moses Mlangeni, SABC Radio