

Opening of the first Southern African Gender and Media Summit

By Juliana Omale

The first Southern African Gender and Media Summit opened in Johannesburg on Sunday, bringing together over 180 media practitioners, trainers, researchers, media regulatory authorities, NGOs and activists from sub-Saharan Africa and as far afield as India, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Over the next two days participants at the summit will exchange experiences around gender and media initiatives within individual countries and across the region and highlight the most effective strategies to integrate gender issues in media practice and output.

Research on gender in the media in southern Africa has become a critical tool

Gender & Media awards

for putting pressure on media regulatory authorities, media managers and gatekeepers in the newsrooms - as well as on advertisers - to start taking gender issues seriously.

The summit follows on from the Gender and Media Baseline Survey (GMBS) conducted in 12 countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 2002. Covering 25,110 news items (8,642 of these in South Africa) the survey was a landmark study of gender in the editorial content of the southern African media. The survey was commissioned by two regional organisations that promote gender equality through the media: Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa).



Deputy Minister of Correctional Services presents the first prize to Puleng Mokhoane in the television category.

The survey found coverage on gender violence, HIV/Aids, links between custom, culture, religion and gender inequalities to be sensationalised and lacking in depth or context. Today, it is evident that media practitioners and organisations have benefitted from the GMBS and show more depth and sensitivity in their coverage of gender issues.

In her opening remarks, Gender Links' executive director, Colleen Lowe Morna said the more than 180 participants attending the summit were not only there to celebrate the increasing importance of gender equality in all aspects of the media since the GMBS, but also would find concrete ways to move forward from the survey.

"Last August, the SADC heads of states meeting in Mauritius announced that the quota for women in decision-making had been raised from 30 to 50 percent," she said. "This action effectively raises the stakes for the attainment of gender parity." Lowe Morna said no other country or region in the world had ever taken such a crucial decision. The media in the SADC region must be credited for being part of that policy shift.

Misa's Jennifer Mufune said these developments signaled the coming of age of African gender and media initiatives. "We are encouraged by the very positive responses from the stakeholders and there is no describing the sheer energy of the partner organisations who participated in the GMBS."

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A night to remember

By Arthur Okwemba

Marie Geraldine Quirin stared up at the ceiling as she fought back the emotions and was for a moment lost for words as she was declared the winner in the print category of the first Southern African Gender and Media Awards.

Tears welling-up in her eyes, the Mauritian journalist said: "It is a pride for me to win this prize as it brings tidings of good news, encouragement and recognition of my work as journalist."

She won for her story "These 'Misters' that toddlers call 'Miss'" about two men running a day-care centre, published in *Weekend*, a weekly newspaper in Mauritius.

Tension and pressure mounted as the 13 other finalists waited for the announcement of the winners. When her name was announced, Babongile Thabede, a former student at Durban Institute of Technology, flashed a V-sign for victory and exclaimed: "This is a dream come true. I wasn't expecting such recognition as it was my first attempt in making a documentary." She and her two teammates, won the runner-up prize for their documentary, "Ihlo Lentombi" (isiZulu for "The eye of the virgin").

The documentary explores the issue of virginity testing in KwaZulu-Natal, the challenges facing the practice in the era of HIV and AIDS, and the balance between traditional values and human rights.

Thozama Mbili, the director of the documentary, described the award as a wonderful recognition for work produced by students like her. "It was a great feeling to learn that we have emerged in such a position in an international competition," she said. The third member of the team, Pearl Nocuze, said the award is a stepping stone to greater things.

In her keynote address that set the stage for the presentation of the awards, Ferial Haffajee, editor of South Africa's *Mail and Guardian* newspaper, said campaigns to make space for gender issues in the media are having an effect. "The presentation of media and gender awards tonight is an affirmation of this. I hope those who have won the awards will go from strength to strength."

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