

Gender activists get under one umbrella

By Thozama Mbili & Babongile Thabede

In an attempt to give more weight to the voice of gender activists, regional gender and media networks and various media women's associations are set to launch the Southern African Gender and Media Network on Tuesday, 14 September at the southern African Gender and Media Summit, taking place in Johannesburg.

The southern African Gender and Media Network will share experiences and challenges faced by gender activists in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The network will also monitor progress towards achieving greater gender balance in the media. The network's constitution was still being finalised on Sunday evening.

Speaking at the start of a five-hour meeting, where participants discussed the constitution of the network, Rashweat Mukundu, director of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) in Zimbabwe,

said the network will mobilise resources and increase the flow of information between gender activists in the SADC region. Even though the criteria that will be used to elect the representatives for the Network has not been clearly spelled-out yet, Mukundu is confident that the newly elected representatives will have excellent track records in gender and media activism and represent the region as a whole.

All participating organisations will nominate one representative on Monday. From this group an executive committee will be elected. Elections for the Network will take place on Tuesday morning.

Ammu Joseph from the Network of Women in Media in India said the Summit is an opportunity to learn from the southern African experience regarding gender and media issues. She hopes that the countries in South Asia will one day establish a similar network.



Women media practitioners will find like-minded activists in the new Southern African Gender and Media Network that will be launched during the summit.



Stories continue from page 1

Research on gender in the media in the SADC region has so far emanated mostly from South Africa. The GMBS broadened its scope and confirmed global findings. Women constitute less than 20 percent of news sources and they are primarily depicted as victims of violence or as objects of beauty.

Mavis Moyo, a veteran Zimbabwean journalist attending the summit, said the GMBS had led to improvements in the way news is reported. "We must take pride in this African media initiative, but we cannot sit back and relax until the world understands that it is complete when it is made up of women and men."

But the numbers alone do not tell the whole story. Among the highlights of the summit are the Gender and Media Awards, a first for southern Africa and the continent as a whole. The award-winning articles tell stories with clarity, sensitivity and variety, demonstrating how far the regional media has come since the GMBS. The entries represent quality and depth of coverage in keeping with the summit theme, "Making every voice count".

According to Loga Virahsawmy, president of the Media Watch Organisation in Mauritius, the summit is a culmination of the dynamism and hard work of the GMBS partners. "When we started out we had no idea that we would generate so much energy," she said. She is particularly proud of the Mauritian Directory of Women Sources which will be launched on Monday evening. "This is an important tool for journalists," she said. "We can now tell journalists, 'we are giving you the sources, please give us the voices'."