



**GMDC Seminar and Gender and Media Diversity Journal  
Launch**  
***Media, Activism and Change***  
**7 May 2008, Gender Links Offices, Johannesburg**



**SHOULD JOURNALISTS BE ACTIVISTS?**  
**Panel discussion and cyber dialogue**  
***Report***

Panelists: Susan Smuts (Deputy Managing Editor, Sunday Times); Tonya Graham (Community Media for Development); Deborah Walter (Editor, Gender Links) and Maleshoane Motsiri (Counsellor, POWA)

Quote of the day: "Writing an 'I' story, putting my experiences on paper was a liberating and healing experience," Maleshoane Motsiri.

This report highlights key points raised by the panellists, the cyber dialogues and discussions.

### **1. Why a journal on *Media, Activism and Change*?**

*(Deborah Walters)*

- In putting together this issue, many questions and contradictions arose about the role of media, as well as how activists are using media to forward their own agendas.
- It is hoped that this edition of the journal will inspire discussion on media and activism, and create more dialogue on both media's role in social change, as well as how activists can make better strategic use of media.
- This edition contains many perspectives and examples of initiatives, yet many more exist and are continuously emerging.
- The recent launch of the Gender and Media Diversity Centre further provides opportunities for media and activists (and those who may consider themselves both) to engage in debate and dialogue, share ideas, and create partnerships.

### **2. Changing face of journalism: Everyone knows someone series – Sunday Times**

*(Susan Smuts)*

- This series on HIV and AIDS started in April 2006 and was meant to run pieces by prominent people for a month.
- The response to the slot was overwhelming and has been running regularly for two years.
- The stories are unique and give a human element.
- South Africans are given the opportunity to view HIV and AIDS with a different lens.
- Media activism allows for issues in society to be seen and given a voice.
- Sharing of these stories in this manner is powerful as it shows to the average South African a reality that is rarely seen.

### **3. Media for social change: Using radio drama to raise awareness on trafficking**

*(Tonya Graham)*

- Community Media for Development (CMFD) has put together a 13 part radio drama airing in Zambia, Mozambique and RTP Africa (Portuguese station).
- The story is in context of migration – trafficking of women, men; informal traders; border crossers and the harassment you face as a result of this.
- Xenophobia as a theme runs through the drama.

- The research undertaken for this project includes interviewing of over 100 migrants in South Africa.
- They testified to being misled e.g. being brought to South Africa under pretence of domestic work only to end up being a sex worker and with very little pay if any.
- The scripts for the radio drama were also tested on the migrants for authenticity.
- Almost everyone has a radio or at least access to one thus is the easiest way to reach the masses.
- It is very engaging allowing people to easily identify with the characters.
- The show is very real and the issues are clear but it transmitted through fiction.
- There is a play on words in the names of the series to appeal to its listeners e.g. **Dealers meaning traders/Mafia** (English series) and **Troco meaning Pocket Change/Change in Life** (Portuguese series). Reflecting that not all is what it seems.
- The English series features a Zambian actress who has just completed her high school education and had been offered a lucrative job in Canada.
- After taking part in the series she rethought her offer and sought to investigate it more as it now sounded too good to be true!

#### **4. Power of writing in healing: "I" stories**

*(Maleshoane Motsiri)*

- I did an "I" Story to share my experience with others and hopefully change a life.
- In meeting with others I found strength in numbers, group sharing is very powerful. You realise that you being in a violent situation does not necessarily make you ignorant or stupid.
- I now work at POWA and counsel other women and young girls.
- I am dismayed by the justice system of our country as it truly fails women. For example, there is an old lady who read the "I" Stories booklet and related to it but chose to stay in the abusive relationship as she has no where to turn to. She however says that her mind is liberated.
- Gender Links intends on tracking all "I" Stories participants, a project that has already started, and carrying a follow up on their lives and how writing their stories has changed their lives.

#### **5. Should journalists be activists?**

- Journalists should go beyond reporting the news.
- Journalists should assist in correcting the ills of society by writing to influence change and policy makers.
- Journalists should take up a diversity of issues ranging from gender to politics not just what is considered traditionally newsworthy.
- Editors who are not interested in certain topics may think it's not important and may kill the story. Stories should be written with the audience in mind.
- Journalism should be geared towards change and contributing to a more just society.
- Journalism is not objective even now because most journalism is targeted to the bottom line.
- The media should reflect the reality of the society it serves.
- Journalists should not be biased in any way; activism will mean they are taking sides.