

Media conference highlights quality issue

African media workers, policy makers and managers candidly tackled issues affecting quality and professionalism in journalism and the media at the recent 11th annual Highway Africa Conference in Grahamstown. Approximately 600 delegates attended the 2007 conference, a jump from 531 in 2006.

Commented Highway Africa director Chris Kabwato, “The annual conference has grown significantly, boasting a steady increase in delegates from a growing number of countries across Africa and sustained private sector support through mutually beneficial, visionary partnerships.”

Some of the issues, tackled at SABC live broadcasts of plenary sessions and other round table discussions, included questions of journalism and professionalism. Does online dissemination qualify a person to be called a journalist? Robert Kabushenga, of Uganda's *New Vision*, said that quality was being affected by lack of adequate training and professionalism.

Lack of resources

While delivering a talk on the ‘Challenges of Producing the Sunday Newspaper’, Lizeka Mda, managing editor of *City Press*, South Africa, said that most of the Sunday publications lack the necessary support to improve their content. This lack of resources makes it difficult to compete with television, Internet, radio and cellphone networks. She also pointed out that the budget hampers efforts to recruit seasoned and skilled journalists.

When coming to ‘Quality and Professionalism in the Newsroom: the Gender Dimension’, journalist and blogger Ansbert Ngurumo said that efforts to tackle gender issues should start at the family level to fight gender stereotypes that are evident in work places and in social life. He also suggested that organisers of the conference should involve men in all debates about gender issues. The panel – comprising Brenda Zulu, a freelance journalist from Zambia; Kubi Rama, Gender and Media of South Africa (GEMSA); and Rosemary Okello, director of the African Women and Child Feature Service in Nairobi – was unanimous in their call for more work to be done towards enlightening media managers on gender disparity in the media.

Some of the books launched at this year's conference included Geoffrey Nyarota's *Against the Grain*, which examines the trials and tribulations of Zimbabwe's independent press. Other books included Professor Guy Burger's *50 Years of Journalism* and Charlayne Hunter-Gault's *New News out of Africa*.

New Media Awards

For the seventh year running, the Highway Africa Awards for the Innovative Use of New Media in Africa were held at the

conference. The awards are presented annually at the conference to recognise and promote the creative, innovative and appropriate use of new media technology in Africa.

Zachary Ochieng was the winner for the Highway Africa News Agency (HANA) Journalist of the Year award, his prize a laptop sponsored by Siemens. The individual/student category award was won by Ismail Farouk from SA for his website, www.sowetouprising.com, while Kamal Ben, an SA-based correspondent of www.islamonline.net, won the non-profit category award. Vincent Maher from the *Mail and Guardian Online* won the corporate category award for his blog aggregator www.amatomu.com.

The Free Software and Open Source in Africa (FOSSFA) announced a new media award what will be introduced for the 2008 awards event.

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