

EU, Save the Children plead for children's rights respect in SA, Zambia media

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The European Union (EU), Save the Children, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), South Africa's Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and Zambia's Media Network on Child's Rights and Development (MNCRD) last week jointly launched a daring project, 'Children and Media: Championing Best Practice', which aims to work with 570 children and 500 journalists to ensure children's rights are respected in the media, and a more representative and ethical journalism is practised in both countries.

Critics continue to deplore the increasingly 'unethical' behaviour of most African media houses, which sensationalise children's stories to boost circulation, viewership and listenership in the view of making huge profits.

"Media means power, the power to change"

"Media means power, the power to change, change attitudes, change knowledge and change reality," Timothy Bainbridge, Save the Children regional director, said, speaking at the Michelangelo Hotel in Johannesburg on Thursday, 24 February 2011.

Bainbridge said every journalist and media house must abide by the ethics that dictate about how to report on children's issues.

"This project is one in which we hope to see children and the media working together to gather more influence, and to change the way the world views them."

The R1.2 million project, mainly funded by the EU and 20% by SIDA, consists of three fundamental elements, namely:

- develop ethical guidelines for reporting on children,
- establish a children's news agency, and
- train child media monitors.

William Bird, head of MMA, said the media guidelines it developed in collaboration with local media organisations have been adopted by the Independent Newspapers and the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF).

Child media monitors to provide feedback

Child media monitors, some of whom have been undergoing rigorous training since 2003, are set to provide feedback to editors and journalists.

MMA said child monitors recently engaged in a live radio debate with journalists and editors on Talk Radio 702 (Redi Tlhabi's show), and [made a submission](#) as part of the [SA Press Council public hearings](#).

The Michelangelo event in Johannesburg was linked via video conferencing with the project launch in Lusaka, Zambia, where MNCRD coordinator Henry Kabwe said he was confident the project will bring higher levels of commitment and support for children's rights in Zambia and SA.

The MMA and its Zambia counterpart are said to be collaborating with respective local schools in the view to select schoolchildren who will attend a series of workshops in the near future.

Increase children's rights

EU delegation in SA member Susanne Martin, who described the project as 'changing the bulb', said it will engage with 25 Zambian and SA print media and electronic news media, with a daily audience of close to nine million. This, she pointed out, will increase children's rights and enhance the space for children to voice their opinions.

Sunday Times editor Ray Hartley said the nature of children's coverage in the media should focus more in encouraging education and achievement: "We must also initiate ways of looking at content generated by children even though it is a hard decision to make since this content will surely not help sell newspapers."

Hartley also said media should strive to devote more space for children's issues.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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