

Tekst 7

the back half

Must Africa always be reported by chaps in cowboy hats?

MEDIA ♦ IAN HARGREAVES

When people of earnest goodwill debate the future of the Internet and its effect upon journalism, it does not take long before someone raises the question of the growing gap between the “information rich” and the “information poor”. What use can the Internet be to that majority of the world’s population which does not even have a telephone? What use can it be in Africa, which has fewer telephone lines than New York City?

16 it is clear that the net is starting to make an impact in the world’s poorest continent. Tanya Accone, one of Africa’s small but growing number of on-line editors, recently predicted that it would be “the great leveller of Africa”, enabling journalists to e-mail their way past censorship, and encouraging low-budget virtual publications for cheap distribution over the World Wide Web. 17 the rebels fighting the incompetent government of Congo have their own website, and many of Africa’s newspapers are available in some form or other on the net.

When Africa News Online (<http://www.africanews.org>), a web-based service which publishes news from more than 30 African titles from the *Sowetan* to the *Addis Ababa Monitor*, started up three years ago, it was able to network into only six African countries. Today it reaches 47 out of 54 countries, and is starting to pay worthwhile royalties to its member organisations.

All too obviously, this 18 Africa’s vast rural poor. You could argue that anyone with their interests at heart should concentrate not on either television or the Internet, but on radio. Africans own more radios than telephones and, unlike the Internet, the radio makes no demands on literacy and doesn’t involve call charges.

The one group that does have access to the Internet, however, is the continent’s own increasingly confident and well-trained corps of journalists. Judging by those who came to discuss the reporting of their continent at Cardiff University last week, they are communicating more effectively with each other and with the world beyond Africa as a result of the Internet, 19 the culture of press freedom as they do so.

Africans are certainly 20 the way we report them. Since the cold war, the western public has stopped taking Africa’s politics seriously and, without apartheid, there is a loss of moral

engagement, especially in America and Britain.

To African eyes, the west is fixated upon the televisual image of the white aid worker cradling a poor, sick African child, substituting what one speaker at the conference called a “tyranny of 21” for previous types of political and economic control. Professor Helge Rønning of Oslo University accused journalists not only of exporting clichés, but also of failing to question sufficiently the motives of the aid organisations that provide their air passage into disaster zones in return for emotive publicity. If journalists collaborated with business in this way, it would be “seriously questioned as a form of undue and unethical influence”, he said. Wilfred Kiboro, chief executive of the Nairobi-based Nation press group, urged 22 to open their eyes not only to Africa’s manifest failures, but also to its successes. Kiboro mocked the western chaps in cowboy hats and combat fatigues, with more pockets than there are days in the week, knocking off their pieces to camera just beyond the backdrop of a five-star hotel.

Too often the attempts to counter western media domination are ineffective. The Pan African News Agency, set up in 1983 by the Organisation of African Unity, is a creature of governments and it has suffered the fate of all such mouthpieces – it is not trusted. In an attempt to revive the agency, the OAU announced last year that it would be privatised, with the majority of shares sold to commercial African media owners. But so far only \$12 million of the

intended \$19 million has been raised. African journalists would like to see the agency in private hands, but doubt that it will attract the resources to displace the distorted foreign media agenda.

This may be too pessimistic. A privatised and properly managed agency may be able to construct sound alliances with other agencies, not all of which 23 Africa. As Mark Wood, editor-in-chief of Reuters, points out: in the last year, his agency filed 48,850 stories on Africa, of which 28,000 concerned business, markets and economics.

Wood is an Internet enthusiast – for Africa, he says, it is “24 waiting to happen”. The Internet is a technology beyond the absolute control both of African dictators and western media empires, but one that supports the principle of free and open exchange which underpins global capitalism. Ensuring it stays that way is one of the more useful things the west can do for Africa.



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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p 16 ■

- A Furthermore,
- B Likewise,
- C Thus
- D Yet

1p 17 ■

- A Apart from this,
- B Even
- C In contrast,

1p 18 ■

- A determines the fate of
- B does not do much for
- C will also benefit

1p 19 ■

- A accepting
- B challenging
- C endangering
- D strengthening

1p 20 ■

- A curious about
- B ill-informed on
- C not happy about
- D pleased with

1p 21 ■

- A compassion
- B poverty
- C western materialism

1p 22 ■

- A aid organisations
- B foreign reporters
- C international investors
- D the African press

1p 23 ■

- A are based outside
- B are focused on
- C are supportive of
- D have given up on

1p 24 ■

- A a disaster
- B a liberation
- C an addiction
- D an illusion
- E a surprise