



HIFC praised for throwing lifeline to journalists

By Chris Arnold Msipa

The economic and political disorder of the past decade in Zimbabwe devastated the lives of the majority of the Sub-Saharan country's citizens, among them journalists.

I am one of the media practitioners who became almost destitute due to the mayhem, until a colleague recently informed me about the Humanitarian Information Facilitation Centre (HIFC), which has helped me get back on my feet.

My experience despite having lost everything and sustaining a broken leg at the height of the political situation in Zimbabwe, may not be the worst. Other journalists fled the country while others were incarcerated. However, sanity now seems on the horizon with the activation of apolitical programmes like the HIFC, a scheme that further promises to melt down the glaring polarization in the currently "sleeping" industry.

I have personally benefited from HIFC, which I only found out about in September 2009 after meeting a colleague and friend, Chris Chinaka, at a media conference in Harare.

I didn't hide from him the fact that I was in a fix. He knew about the incident in which I was attacked and left for dead, with a broken leg, in 2004 in Chivhu town, 141 km south-east of the capital. I also informed him of the loss of all my property thereafter in an unexplained fire accident. In this incident, I lost what I needed to operate – computers and broadcast equipment.

continued to page 4

HIFC hosts media roundtable discussion



Professor Steven Coon gives lecture on ethics to journalists and other participants

The HIFC, in partnership with the American Embassy Public Affairs Section in September hosted a media roundtable meeting on media ethics. The guest speaker was Steven Coon, Emeritus Associate Professor at the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, Iowa State University in America.

The topic for the discussion was: **How can the media maintain high professional standards in a politically challenging media environment?** Fifteen media practitioners from various backgrounds attended the meeting and exchanged insightful experiences with the guest speaker.



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The HIFC Update

In this issue:

HIFC praised for throwing lifeline to journalists	— 1
HIFC hosts media roundtable	— 1
Stop stock outs campaign	— 2
The UZ reopens	— 4

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continued to page 3

STOP STOCK - OUTS Campaign

By Tafadzwa Chimbodza



Launch of the Stop Stock Outs Campaign in Zimbabwe

THE Kariba story on access to essential medicines as told by Samson Coffee is one of the numerous community stories around a key component of comprehensive health care in Zimbabwe. It is the story of a community attempting to obtain essential drugs from their local health centers.

Samson is a voluntary health monitor with the Community Working Group on Health (CWGH), a community based organization that seeks to collectively enhance public participation on critical health issues in Zimbabwe. He has a compelling story to narrate on the difficulties the people of Kariba encounter in accessing essential medicines.

"Due to the socio-economic challenges, clinics ran out of medicines in 2007 and the community could not access treatment and medicines. There was nothing in stock, not even a simple painkiller," he said. "Common illnesses such as colds, flus and headaches went untreated."

Samson felt that the situation was deplorable and could be mitigated by certain community initiatives but first, he had to understand the dynamics at play. Samson decided to undertake a case study of the Kariba community's attempts to access basic medicines. His story is based on information he obtained from health workers at the two clinics in Kariba as well as personal observations:

Several people with chronic conditions such as hypertension, tuberculosis and diabetes defaulted-

on their medication due to shortages of the essential drugs.

Some patients died whilst others developed resistance to certain antibiotics.

He also bemoaned the fact that ultimately, the Kariba community has resorted to seeking treatment from neighboring Zambia in a small town called Siavonga. Patients travel distances of up to 10km to access health centers. This highlights the sad reality that communities are facing due to lack of access to essential medicines.

The story goes beyond just painting a sad picture of the health delivery system; it can be used to lobby and inform for interventions.

Samson shared this story on the platform provided at the CWGH press briefing on their national campaign on access to essential medicines titled: STOP STOCK OUTS. Prior to his presentation, the CWGH Health Education Officer, Tafadzwa Chigariro gave a brief on essential medicines, defining them as medicines which satisfy the needs of the majority of the population and therefore should be available at all times, in adequate amounts, in appropriate dosages and at a price the individual and community can afford.

CWGH recognizes the important role played by the media plays in ensuring that members of society are fully informed about issues pertaining to their welfare. Where this is not the case, or where the public are not aware of this right, it is incumbent upon media actors to raise such awareness, as well as advocate for any necessary reforms, on behalf of their various publics.

"It became imperative to include the media in the process as a key stakeholder. Simple situation analyses showed that media practitioners are or were unaware of the issues around access to essential medicines," explained Tafadzwa.

With this background, the Humanitarian Information Facility Centre (HIFC) and CWGH decided to hold a press briefing and a sensitization discussion to give journalists a background on issues around access to essential medicines.

As part of its mandate and its vision of the attainment of access to essential medicines for all, the CWGH was instrumental in introducing a Kariba health committee that works with the health workers as an inter-link between the community and health staff. The committee is working to fundraise for their clinics and ensure that drug stocks are improved and also help those who cannot afford clinic charges.

UZ reopening does little to quell students' grievances

By Rumbidzai Bara

The HIFC's third education sector discussion held in September focused on the reopening of University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and the day to day challenges faced by students. Some of the major challenges discussed included the impact of lecturers' strike and the exorbitant fees being demanded by authorities.

Participants included journalists, UZ students, representatives from the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), Students Solidarity Trust (SST) and SAYWHAT – an HIV and AIDS youth organization. Dr Reneth Mano, a lecturer at UZ as well as HIFC's Steering Committee chair facilitated the discussion.

The tuition fees being demanded from students range from US\$400 to US\$600 per semester depending on faculty. These fees are meant to be a lifeline to lecturers so that they earn a realistic salary. Parents however, find the fees to be crippling and this has resulted in a large number of university dropouts..

Kudzanai Masunungure, a second year student at UZ said he was distressed by the fact that many of his friends were forced to leave their studies. When the university closed down indefinitely in February 2009, a group of his friends were forced to look for menial jobs before attaining their degrees; at least half of them left the country in search of greener pastures.

A good number of students also dropped out just after the UZ reopened because they could no longer afford the fees.

According to ZINASU, surveys in all Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions revealed that parents and students were prepared to pay only \$50 in tuition fees per semester. ZINASU is of the opinion that government should be paying the fees and

opposes the exorbitant fees being charged by UZ. The other participants in the discussion however unanimously concurred that \$50 was ridiculously low by any standards and would not cover even a small fraction of the expenses incurred by a student at tertiary level.

Participants also interrogated the question of whether students and parents or the government should pay one hundred percent of the tuition fees. It was pointed out that the government is bankrupt and cannot realistically be expected to subsidize students' tuition fees. It was realized that parents may need to accept the fact that they would be bearing the burden of paying for their children to acquire an education without government subsidies.

It was further discussed that in order to maintain and raise the quality of education offered in tertiary institutions, lecturers needed to be given incentives along with competitive salaries that are commensurate with what are being paid other lecturers in the region.

"Most lecturers have left the University of Zimbabwe to go to other countries where remuneration and working conditions are more lucrative. This has compromised the quality of education at the institution and other universities as well," said Dr Mano.

At the end of the discussion, strong recommendations were made that a platform for dialogue be created between the UZ administration and the students body – specifically ZINASU, to improve understanding. The students' body was encouraged to find ways of communication that would not be perceived to be confrontational. This would probably increase the chances of the authorities taking heed of and addressing the students' grievances

HIFC hosts media ethics roundtable

continued from page 1

In his talk, Professor Coon asked each participant their opinion on the existence of media ethics in the news reporting of journalists. The general feeling was that ethics in Zimbabwe are not non-existent, but are increasingly being compromised as the socio-economic and political situation deteriorates.

In the same session, participants got the opportunity to interrogate a series of ethically challenging scenarios that often confront journalists, forcing them to compromise their integrity and professionalism. Points of major interest were around chequebook journalism, conflict of interest and the protection of sources.

Professor Coon also shared a journalism code of ethics that is operational in America, and urged participants to be proactive in the formation of one for the Zimbabwean media.

Representatives from the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), tertiary journalism training institutions and journalists formed the main portion of the participants.

HIFC praised for throwing lifeline to journalists

continued from page 1

My life was in shambles when I met Chinaka. I lived in a wooden cabin in the small mining town of Mvuma, 190 km south-east of the capital. I could not even buy myself a meal and relied on friends.

I told Chinaka how I had approached a number of media organizations in the country for assistance, not charity, but some work I could do and get paid. While the Media Institute for Southern African (MISA) offered Internet access, there were immediate needs such as cash for food, transport and accommodation. It is these needs that the HIFC journalists grant and mentoring programme immediately addressed as soon as I had my story ideas approved.



Some of the beneficiaries of the Grant and Mentorship programme, utilizing HIFC's computer and internet services

Chinaka, after listening carefully to my brief tale, referred me to HIFC. He felt I could benefit from the HIFC programme for journalists, which he at one time headed. With my previous experiences still fresh in my mind, I was not too optimistic when I contacted the HIFC Consulting Editor Leonissah Munjoma, who invited me to visit. Following my visit to HIFC offices, I pitched two story ideas which were approved after which I signed a contract and got part of the grant disbursed by the ever sympathetic Natasha Msonza. From the day I signed that contract, I have not looked back. It was that part payment that changed my world and gave me hope. On that day, I knew that the people I had been staying with would smile as I would walk into their home carrying some goodies!

The facility, set up to promote coverage of humanitarian issues in the media in Zimbabwe offers journalists US\$250 to cover costs in researching, writing and publishing or broadcasting of two stories. After getting the part payment, I was able to travel to Mvuma from Harare to research and write the articles that have since been published.

The glow that comes with seeing one's work in print or on screen is not confined to beginners, as I was to discover recently. I felt really good after later reading my first postings under the scheme. Then I was paid the balance, restoring all my self confidence.

The HIFC programme for journalists does not just offer grants and let journalists write the stories and disappear; there is a mentoring aspect to it. After story ideas have been approved and the contract signed, the journalist is assigned a mentor. This is an experienced journalist who is expected to guide the grantee through the development of the story. They are expected to discuss the best approaches to a particular story and how best it could be covered.

It is not just a question of the journalist writing the story and submitting it to the mentor, they are expected to consult the mentor during the writing process. I was assigned Chris Chinaka as my mentor and this excited me as this is someone who has almost seen it all in the trade. Despite my many years of editing, Chinaka made me feel I was hearing it all for the first time. Yes, most of it rang a bell. But I still felt refreshed and ready to go.

Covering humanitarian issues may sound like an easy task at face value. But there is much more than just writing a story about people's welfare. One has to use different techniques in handling different types of humanitarian stories and this can only be made possible with the assistance of the mentoring programme.

The HIFC programme for journalists is a well thought-out scheme, a sincere display of honest desire to empower journalists in an almost impossible situation like ours. What is more is that HIFC allows the journalists to have the stories published in a medium of their choice and the story is not owned by HIFC. However, noting that some journalists may have problems finding story outlets, HIFC is working with some media houses to have some of the stories written under the grant published by them.

Hands up to HIFC for throwing a lifeline to journalists.



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