

## PRESENTATION TO PLENARY JULY 18<sup>th</sup>

### As we say in South Africa, all protocol observed....

I speak on behalf of six southern African communications advocacy NGO's and the 57 institutional members of the WSIS Civil Society African caucus. More importantly I speak on behalf of the hundreds of African people who's stories we have recorded in an effort to build a platform for people who's daily burden of survival is far removed from the deliberations of WSIS.

We appreciate that there is a clear intention here to create a better world for all, but we cannot see how a continent with limited capital, in monetary and capacity terms will attain equal opportunity for participation in an information society without a major shift in global economic imperatives and values.

Raphael Correia, 28 is a fisherman in northern Angola. He spends his days catching fish that are never more than 5cm in length. He must catch enough fish to feed 19 family members each night. Raphael has never made a phone call but knows that he could, if he had some coins and if he travels the eight hours by donkey cart to the nearest telephone.

Zenzile Shendembr in Malawi, teaches villagers to read. After completing school herself and being unemployed for four years she undertook a two-week long literacy training course that qualified her for this task. The school equipment consists of a log to sit on and a piece of stone to write on. The classroom is underneath a tree. Maria doesn't mention how a school building would improve learning conditions - no, she longs for a small library - a little box of books is how she put it - because books can be read at night by her students to non-literate people. Books can be read by candle or firelight, they don't require electricity.

Driving through the Caprivi Strip in Namibia a small television antenna in a village with no power was spotted. There in Kanzinzila village was Postrick, severely disabled by a condition that could have been corrected at birth, a self-taught mender of broken radios. At 24, Postrick had never been able to go to school but had heard from his brothers, who did, about television broadcasts. Together they convinced the village Headman to purchase a television, a car battery and a solar panel.

Sitting on the sandy ground at night, the villagers are now able to watch television. The car battery powers the television for two to three nights. The battery is then re-charged through the solar panel. The tragic twist to this thirst for knowledge is that the solar panel was broken during the long distance over unmade road on the way to the village. It doesn't work very well and it takes two weeks to re-charge the car battery. So every two weeks the village watches television for two nights. Even then, the only free to air service available is the state broadcaster, which in turn has its own capacity and resource limitations. Content is largely comprised of cheap, old international programs. The village Headman lamented that he may have made a bad decision in allowing this development. He pointed to the feeling of inadequacy that has developed among the heads of households in the village, because they are unable to provide the kind of life that appears in the Bold and the Beautiful.

Estelle Mdlouvo, a young single mother who volunteers in a community radio station in Mozambique's Inhambane Province is patently aware that though she must walk many kilometres each day to volunteer at the station, that this is an essential contribution to her community. She says,

'Information that is worth the most is that which contributes to fulfilling our daily needs. None is better than that given by us, about us, for us.'

This is a grass roots struggle for communication rights. Estelle is fortunate to live in a country where regulation enables community based radio. In the same area we heard groups of children singing 'the chicken song'. This catchy and popular tune played by the community radio station, is about how to treat Newcastle disease, the number one killer of Mozambique's number one source of protein.

Nine months ago, in the south of Zambia a small community radio station celebrated the establishment of what can only be described as a tenuous connection via radio link, to an ISP. The station can now send and receive news - about two sentences every evening. Station Manger Perfect Mbazima made it very clear - No fancy formatting or pictures in emails in or out - the connection cannot handle it. But the listener's horizons have broadened considerably because they now hear and can discuss, useful information that is selected by a volunteer based in the capital Lusaka.

Creating an environment for these communication initiatives to flourish leads to information exchange that gives people the dignity of contributing to their own development. Such an environment will not be created in a globalising world, without a real commitment to change and a visionary and realistic plan of action underpinned by a recommitment to human rights.

It is not often that an opportunity to impact on the global agenda arises and we urge you to consider the realities of the people we have introduced here in your deliberations during WSIS.

The African caucus asserts that you can have information without development, but you cannot have development without information and the ability to communicate.

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