

highwayAFRICA



CONCEPT DOCUMENT FOR HIGHWAY AFRICA CONFERENCE 2008

Theme: Citizen Journalism, Journalism for Citizens

Dates: 8-10 September 2008

Venue: Eden Grove Complex, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

1. Background

Highway Africa is a partnership between Rhodes University (School of Journalism and Media Studies) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), with the support of several partners, development agencies and sponsors.

For eleven years the Highway Africa conference has been at the centre of Africa's debates on journalism and new media. The conference has over the years become the largest annual gathering of African journalists in the world (701 in 2007). In the last four years Highway Africa has evolved into a multi-pronged programme with the following components:

- **Research:** mapping the terrain of the challenges of the interface of technology, journalism and the media
- **Education and Training:** responding to the gaps identified in the research this project makes a practical intervention by re-skilling, upskilling, educating and training journalists.
- **News Agency:** a niche news agency with a network of correspondents across the continent it offers weekly news digest on ICT developments in Africa
- **Conference:** the flagship of the programme, it is the forum for critical reflection on journalism, media and technology and a celebration of Africa

2. 2008 Theme: Citizen Journalism, Journalism for Citizens

Over the past few years the world has witnessed a surge in the use of new media - especially those based on the World Wide Web - by ordinary users across the globe. Parallel to this upsurge has been the development of the semantic web (Web 2.0, Web 3.0). The emergence of social networking websites such as MySpace,

Facebook, YouTube and ubiquitous use of instant messaging technologies such as Skype, Yahoo and MSN has marked the shift in the utility of the internet. Time magazine's 2006 decision to name "you" its person of the year at once acknowledged and publicized the prevalence and utility of content generated by ordinary internet users.

Mobile phone technology and its dramatic penetration in Africa and the developing world opens myriad possibilities for empowering the ordinary citizen to access and to generate content. Through "Mxit" style systems there is now enormous use of instant messaging on cellphones, raising new challenges for dissemination and interaction with journalistic content

Across the globe examples exist of news sites whose content is generated by ordinary citizens. South Korea may have the best examples but the phenomenon is to be found in as diverse places such as South Africa and the Philippines. The structure and use of such content is frequently different from that of the mainstream although there can be similarities between both.

Some media houses have encouraged their readers/audiences to contribute to major stories by sending in their photographs, video and audio clips, and in doing so make ordinary citizens part of the news production process. Other news media organizations have created options for audiences to subscribe to news alerts to their mobile phones.

Citizenship has often been counterposed with consumership. In much of Africa, there has also been the identity category of subjects added to the mix - where people are neither citizens with rights, nor consumers with some power, but dispossessed and often stateless subjects of tyranny. The advent of citizen journalism means that people can not only consume journalism, but also produce it. They now have, in real terms, not only the rights of access to information produced by journalism, but the right to free expression in a practical form, where they can generate on and comment on journalism. With new media, this means that subjects have new possibilities to build these freedoms.

The challenges in the production of media and its distribution impinge on the quality of journalism and the professionalism of journalists. The 2008 conference will seek to address a number of questions related to the goals of journalism in society and how the ordinary citizen fits within those goals as a consumer and producer.

The questions to be addressed include:

- What is Citizen Journalism?
- How does journalism serve citizens?
- What quality control exists in citizen journalism?
- What technology is driving citizen journalism?
- What are the African experiences of Citizen Journalism?
- How should 'traditional' media respond to citizen journalism?
- What is the 'business model' of citizen journalism?
- How is citizen journalism implicated in the democracy project?
- What should be the technical and journalistic skills of citizen journalists?

- What are the gender dynamics in citizen journalism, media ownership and
- What are the ethical issues arising from citizen journalism?
- Is there a case for 'converged journalism' and multi-skilling of journalists in Africa?
- What is the role of free software and open source in supporting Africans to have a voice in cyberspace?
- Is mobile technology the future of journalism?

Via formal presentations, keynote addresses, workshops, interviews and practical examples, the Highway Africa Conference will explore the challenges of **print, radio, television, online and multimedia**.

3. Venue & Participants

Highway Africa takes place in Grahamstown, close to the South African city of Port Elizabeth. The venue is the Rhodes University campus which provides access to state-of-the-art facilities. These include the "intelligent" building called the "Africa Media Matrix" which houses the School of Journalism and Media Studies. There is a convergent computer lab for skills training, and fully equipped seminar rooms. Accommodation ranges from high quality University Residence rooms through to B&Bs, hotels and guest houses.

The conference is open to journalists, academics, bloggers, students, publishers and other interested media professionals.

A limited number of scholarships will be made available for participants who are unable to cover their costs. The scholarships will be advertised on the Highway Africa website (www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za) from 19 May to 20 June 2008.

4. Parallel and Linked Events

- Highway Africa – SABC New Media Awards ceremony – live televised event
- 3rd Digital Citizen Indaba – using new media for citizen journalism
- Training programme: Advanced Digital Journalism
- Meetings of SA National Editors Forum, Southern African National Editors Forum, The African Editors Forum and community radio representatives
- Free and Open Source Software and African Media: training workshop programme on use of FLOSS in the newsroom
- Book launches
- Exhibitions

For more information: www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za

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For news on ICT developments in Africa: <http://hana.ru.ac.za>