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SHAPING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Journalism Dialogues

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Does the Media Ignore the Plight of the Poor?



The Panel: (L-R) Gcobani Maswana, Steven Lang, Wandile Fana and Andrew Trench

MICHAEL SCHMIDT: If you can all just take a seat, we are just missing one of our panellists, Gcobani Maswana, who is just outside of town; he is just battling his way through the traffic so he will be slightly late, so his apologies. Thank you so much for coming, turning up for the Journalism Dialogues. My name is Michael Schmidt, I am a journalist, I've been doing it for 20 years and love it. This series of Dialogues sprang out of conversations that my company **fray**intermedia had last year with the Press Ombudsman Joe Thloloe who will be facilitating this evening's discussion. Joe indicated that he was concerned that a lot of journalists – despite the high level of signatories to the Press Code of Conduct and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission Code of Ethics – working journalists didn't really understand the codes, didn't know the codes.

And this was against the backdrop of a lot of challenges that were arising in the media. It is a changing media environment, it is very dynamic, it is busy. We specifically put these Dialogues out in parts of the country like this in order to attract, apart from the mainstream media, community journalists who specifically get sponsored to attend these events, because that community sector is just exploding, it is just really growing, particularly in the radio sector. There is a rise of new media as you know with cellphones and blogging and everything and that is changing the way the mainstream media reports.

There is also, I mean we are in a developmental state, there is a whole bunch of challenges going on relating to the role of the media in society. So

Joe suggested that we put together a series of public discussions on where the media was at, encouraging self-reflection on our craft, to try and improve both our understanding of the challenges that we are facing, whether in the industrial, political, social environments, but also just taking a look at ourselves and scrutinising ourselves and seeing whether we were getting things right, because we do get things wrong.

There was a time I think a couple of years back when the media was criticised for its racism and where there was a real digging in of heels, a real resistance to interrogating that from amongst the media, and I am pleased to see that the climate has changed and the fact that you guys have turned out here tonight to look at a topic that most people wouldn't find very sexy is I think an indication of that.

The national debate has very much been dominated by the in-fighting in the ANC leadership and yes we live in one of the most, if not the most, unequal society on the planet. We have got huge challenges. The topic for the evening on how the media actually deals with questions of poverty and does the media ignore the plight of the poor was in fact suggested by the outgoing editor of the Daily Dispatch Felicia Oppelt. I worked for two years as the Sunday Times Bureau Chief for Eastern Cape, so I got to know this neck of the woods pretty well. I got to love it and it is good to [inaudible], but got to see that there were really really big challenges, not just infrastructural challenges, but real basic human needs challenges.

The thing that impressed itself on me the most was I think the terrible plague of malnutrition amongst our young children that stunts their growth and actually prevents them going forward in life. Okay, now the Dialogues have tackled a whole bunch of different topics; we have looked at the proposed media tribunal, we have looked at issues around hate speech, we have looked at issues around the rise of the tabloids, those vibrant cousins of ours – and hopefully we have some tabloid journalists here tonight as well.

Tonight however we are focusing on whether the grass is actually getting trampled while these elephants, these leaders of ours, fight over positions of power and privilege. And how does the media reflect on that, because we I think in part to blame. I think we have perhaps fuelled the imbalance in reportage in terms of what we should be focusing on, but it is not for me to necessarily say.

We have got a great panel here tonight, but first of all I want to introduce you to Joe Thloloe, the Press Ombudsman. He always outdoes me in the sartorial department; it doesn't matter how I try and dress he always looks cooler than me. He is sometimes the big bad wolf because he breathes down your neck and makes sure that you do what you are supposed to be doing, but also a veteran journalist in his own right and very respected so I hand over to Joe.

JOE THLOLOE: Just a couple of remarks before I hand over to our distinguished panel. There are a couple of reasons why I participate in these

dialogues the first one is to try and work myself out of a job. If journalists lived the code and practised the code, I would have no business sitting in that office where I sit and once that day dawns I will retire a very happy man.

But besides coming here to push the South African Press Code, I also get a chance to peep into what South Africans think about our media, ordinary South Africans who are not editors, who are not whatever when they sit at these Dialogues and tell us where we go wrong I think it gives me a very fascinating window.

And of course the last reason I love being part of these Dialogues is to participate in the subjects that are being discussed, media coverage of poverty. The poor don't have the money to pay for the newspapers, they don't have the money to pay for adverts in newspapers. Do we ignore them because of that, or are they being ignored ... are they just being covered as a second thought, an afterthought essentially?

And I think it is important that we should be asking this question seven years from the deadline of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and poverty stands out I think essentially the Millennium goals are designed to deal with poverty. So it is a fascinating subject for me to see how we as journalists are doing, what the public out there thinks about what we are doing, our first speaker was going to be Gcobani Maswana from the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

But he is delayed so instead we will start with Steven Lang, he will just make very brief comments essentially we want this to be run from the floor,

not from up here. Steven Lang will make a few remarks. Steven Lang is editor of the Grocott's Mail, you know the Grahamstown publication that has been in the news recently because of very unfortunate circumstances. I have known Steven for a long time, I think the last time I saw him he was executive producer for the SAfm current affairs programs and he did a fantastic job. Every time I listen to morning show or the PM Live I remember Steven Lang's days ... Steven it is over to you.

STEVEN LANG: Thank you very much Joe; that is flattering; thank you.

When Michael originally proposed this topic of "Does the media ignore the plight of the poor people in this country?", my initial impression was that is a bit of a silly question, because to me the answer is obvious: yes the media by and large *does* ignore the poor people of this country, so I thought well if that is such an obvious thing what is there to debate about? Why are we going to even talk about this, it is a fact. And if anyone would think about challenging that as a fact, I mean you just need to see an example here, a great example in the Eastern Cape that was done by the Dispatch, the case of 122 babies that died from drinking polluted water.

It was quite a big story here in East London, it made the headlines in a couple of other newspapers, but by and large it was not really ... not much attention was given to it on a national scale. And it was an incredible story: 122 babies that died and yet the amount of coverage, national coverage,

given to it was I found surprisingly small. The Dispatch covered it thoroughly and a couple of other local publications did so as well.

Now can you imagine if those 122 babies had been in Sandton and they died in the Sandton Clinic, it would have not only been the biggest national story for months, it would have been on Time Magazine and it would have been all over the place, it would have dominated the media totally. And that is just one example that has local relevance and I think is very obvious. I mean there are many other examples and it is not only South African media that ignores the plight of the poor it is international media as well.

Why does anyone care about what happened to Paris Hilton? The only reason why they care about her is because she is rich. If the exact same thing happened to an impoverished lady in King Williams Town no one would ... it wouldn't even make the King Williams Town newspaper never mind anything else. So I think we need to ask other questions like why does the media ignore the plight of the poor and is it right to ignore the plight of the poor? After all, one could argue that the papers print what the people want. If people didn't buy stories about Paris Hilton then newspapers wouldn't write them, so there is that aspect of it that I think is worth debating.

And if we do believe that the issues that affect the poor people of our country should be covered then we need to work out a system that will answer how we are going to do, how we are going to cover it effectively and make it still, Michael used the word "sexy," so that people would want to buy such a newspaper. Thank you.

THOLOE: Steven says yes the media ignore the plight of the poor. I wonder what Wandile says? Wandile Fana is publisher of Skawara News it is a monthly publication I think from Cofimvaba – I hope I am pronouncing it correctly. Wandile is also a director of the Association of Independent Publishers; it is a nationwide association of publishers and he is right at the centre of events here in the Eastern Cape so he should perhaps have more insight than Steven has about what is happening with the coverage of the poor.

WANDILE FANA: But then Mr Steven Lang has been around and is very experienced, I can't say that because I am still his junior, but then I will ask a couple of questions. The papers that we have, the national papers and provincial papers, do they actually represent the demographics of this country you know, and if we understand our history, we come from a history of racial oppression I will say it and most of the papers were founded according to those biases you know.

You know if you look at The Herald, the Daily Dispatch, they are all English-based papers and basically talking for the poor, about the poor maybe in a way, but then there is the big question: do we need to have Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape to actually say that we actually do represent the poor?

And the second question is: most papers that are published, the first thing that comes into their mind with any investor whether it is Avusa or

Media24 it is about the market, who is the market? And the market is always the buying power and the buying power is usually people of a certain class and in that sense then you ... your way of writing and the level of the language you must be writing for, you must be writing for a certain class.

And I mean who is going to want to read the paper about some beggar you know in the streets of East London you know. In actual fact it is very irritating you know what I mean it will be to the reader you know what I mean it will be you know to the editor as well you know that is not a story. I will just make an example: I just did a story in our paper about people that eat on dump sites and it was, to me it actually came out I thought this was it, you know, I had this beautiful picture of this child confronting the camera while the dogs and everybody else were picking around. And she was young, I think she was about five years' old, but she was confronting me. It was a good, good picture and the story was good as well, but no one cared.

It never made money, it never made anything, because in actual fact no one really cares about the poor. We all believe in the promises we were given, that our papers represent the sadness of us, that we need to be ... to aspire to a certain level and they write those aspirations for us that is what we need as a market.

Then there is the other side where we need what I will call "guerrilla journalists" who will go out there and make sure that they do the thing not according to the market, but according to the ethical value of being a human being and do the right thing.

THOLOE: Thanks Wandile. I have got a couple of questions that I will throw your way, but you could be thinking about them while ... or while the ball is passed on to somebody else. Why did publications like Involve die? Is it because people are not interested in Xhosa-language newspapers or is it something else? Again if I look at the Code it says: "The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve society by informing citizens and enabling them to make informed judgments on the issues of the time."

And it also goes on to say: "The freedom of the press allows for an independent scrutiny to bear on the forces that shape society". That is what our Code says. Now are we informing society about the poverty that is around them, so that they can do something about it? Are we challenging the people who can shape our society and saying to them: you committed yourselves to what is in our Constitution, the ideals that are in the Constitution. You committed yourself to the Millennium Development Goals; what are you doing about these things? So these are very serious questions that we should be looking at when we look at poverty.

And we should be balancing that with the market issues that you raised. How we are doing that balance, but perhaps who will immediately jump onto that question of balancing will be Andrew Trench who is editor elect of the Daily Dispatch; I think he takes over from Felicia in December. He is walking into this minefield and he should then be able to tell us how he sees it before he actually traverses that terrain.

ANDREW TRENCH: Thanks Joe. Well I think the simple answer is hopefully not with a blindfold on if we are walking into the minefield. Well first of all let me just say that the fact that this Dialogue is happening has already achieved its purpose in many ways. It has got me thinking of the last while since I knew that I was going to be speaking here about poverty and how we report it in our newspapers. And I mean it has been a good opportunity for some reflection and some good insights that I have found for myself in the reporting that we have done, some inadequacies and also some nice story ideas that have come out of just the thinking around what we have been doing about this.

I mean as Joe points out, we are in some ways the villain of the piece. I mean we are the publication that has to wrestle with those issues of servicing a market as a business that is obviously viable for us and allows us to survive and also being part of a community, which is massively poor. When people say are we reporting about poverty my answer is how can we not? Poverty is one minute away from where we are sitting in Duncan Village.

You know poverty and stories about poverty are not stories that we have to go looking for; they are entwined in the fabric of our media community. You know we have had to tackle some of these stories you guys will know many of them people that live here; I mean the Frere Hospital story is an obvious one.

But I must say also that Frere was never a story of poverty for us and actually some of the journalists who reported the story are here and I am sure

will share their experiences. Frere Hospital was a story about people and I mean every story that we have done, which ... when I was going through our files and saying, well what we have done about poverty and categorising it, actually it only strikes me now but there weren't stories about poverty, because we never saw them like that. I mean the [inaudible] baby death story was a story about babies dying. You know it just happened that the reasons for that were largely to do with poverty.

We wrote a story a while back about a six-year-old kid in a township around the corner here; he was looking after his little brother and it was like one of those child headed families, it was an absolutely terrible, moving story. I mean more recently we had the story about a slightly kind of different poverty story about a mom who was very poor who had given birth to two sets of triplets. In some families that would be a cause for celebration if not some terror, but this was actually, besides being a very interesting kind of medical story, it was also a very tragic human story about how this family was absolutely crippled by the burden they found themselves under.

So you know even with Frere, one of the things that I often say to people is that we service an audience that we have defined. In journalistic parlance our primary audience is an LSM5 to 10, which is essentially your wealthy middle class reader, but all of these stories that I have mentioned, as the guys that will live in this town will know, were on the front page of our newspaper and they weren't about people in our target audience.

And actually on many of those stories we didn't sell particularly well, so why did we put them there? I think it is because in our newspaper, and I don't know that this view is shared more widely, but I think the paper is very connected to its community and the Dispatch in itself has a very particular role and responsibility to bridge the different communities within the larger community that we serve.

What I mean is that is what drove us to publish those stories in the way that we did. First of all because we see the role of the media as being ... part of its role is to act as a conscience for other people. I mean part of our role is to make the rich people that we do produce a newspaper for, care about other people, not because they are poor, but because they are human beings.

With that said I don't want to sit here and sound like this triumphant apologist for our newspaper. We are not perfect either and if I look back and in the course of preparing for this, I mean look at how we have reported other issues that I read about tackling poverty, I mean issues around the basic income grant debate, if you look at our own coverage around that it is essentially framed by questions of who is going to pay for it. I mean, how does it affect rich people? I don't think we have really gotten to that story from the point of view of the people that will actually be affected by it – people for whom R100,00 or R200,00 a month will mean the world of difference. When we report on the budget speech we write about tax breaks for the middle class and those are generally the kind of headline grabbers

you know. The R70,00 increases for pensioners is something that we mention in a paragraph. Have we asked enough questions about what is a R70,00 a month increase for an old age pensioner who is completely dependent on that for their livelihood, what does that actually mean? Their story should be told as powerfully as that of the middle classes who celebrate the tax cuts every year.

So for me I think I agree with Steven that the media generally in South Africa is ignoring poverty. I think here we haven't, not because we are geniuses when it comes to this debate, but just because it is so prevalent in our community it would be like producing a newspaper on Mars if we weren't writing about these issues in our community, because these are the issues that actually drive and frame what goes on in this province.

And I will just pick up on Steven's remark about Frere, I mean and as I said it was never a poverty story for us. And I think what is interesting to observe about Frere as well is that if it hadn't become a political story it would never have been picked up nationally. I mean all the national coverage of that story was not about kids that died and grieving parents and what not, it was about government ... [inaudible] to take revenge on people, etc. etc. which I think is a great shame that somewhere lost in the wash was the grief of these many parents and someone doing something right about it. Anyway I will stop there.

THOLOE: Is that Gcobani? Please take your seat. While Gcobani catches his breath, Andrew just fleetingly touched on a very important issue. He says the stories that they did talking about human beings who were suffering didn't sell particularly well, in other words, it is not just the journalists who have to bear responsibility for what happened, but the public out there who will not buy newspapers that tell the human stories of suffering. That is a serious indictment on ourselves as a nation essentially.

My argument has always been that a community gets the media that it deserves. You spend your money buying that particular publication so whatever is in that publication is what you want out of it otherwise you wouldn't be buying it. And it is a very important insight that I think you brought up. Our final panellist will be Gcobani Maswana ... no let's get it again.

GCOBANE MASWANA: Maswana.

THOLOE: Maswana?

MASWANA: Yes.

THOLOE: Yes, he is from the Department of Social Welfare and Development. It is a pity he came after the journalists spoke, but I am sure you know the defences that the journalists put across, so you will be able to

tell us if you think we as journalists are covering poverty the way we should be.

MASWANA: Thanks. Good evening. In terms then of us as government understanding then how the journalists assist us in our program of informing and educating the public on the issues, I understand we will always differ because we are in this institution with different objectives. The reason why we are there as government we always said we are there to inform, to educate the public about the programmes that we have, but if those programmes are not actually coming right to the people that we are supposed to deliver to and maybe then a certain journalist will come and pick up that then, which means as a government we have to be on the defensive side and we will always then come and blame the journalists, saying they are kind of sensationalising and the like.

But I just want to be honest on various issues. I just want to commend the media on the issues that they have raised, that they have picked up particularly on the poverty reduction issues or poverty alleviation issues. For example the number, when I was still with Social Development when SASSA [the SA Social Security Agency] was not ... was still with us or the payment of grants was still with us, the people on the ground were actually coming and saying: why are you giving a social grant to a child from one to seven and you stop at that age?

And that is what was lifted up by the journalists and it was a kind of something what makes the government to debate those issues. And then there was a policy shift in the way the government was doing the things and there was an extension then in that regard. And in many areas when the government is not performing particularly in the areas of poverty alleviation if we are talking a number of expose then you will find out the government has actually performed some of the duties because those journalists who have dedicated their time trying to maybe assist us as government also to change the lives of the people, because what they are saying maybe is that if then you cannot change then you will write so that you can change.

So we are saying then as government, it is one area that the journalist has assisted us. We understand then as government that we are there to implement the policies and if we are implementing those policies it is not a duty of each and every journalist to actually report that, but what is frustrating us is when those good things are being done and they are not reported as if government is doing nothing, particularly in the area where ... for example they will come up and outline the policies to say this is what we are going to do this year.

You don't get then a follow-up from the journalist or from the communicators to say this is how we are going to implement but in the process of us doing our work then you will find out some certain aspects in that policy speech are ignored and they are not reported and as a result if those issues are not reported as an issue ... like for example today we are

saying the Department of Social Development out of R34-million that we have set aside for the vulnerable, that is children that are being orphaned by HIV and AIDS, we have managed to spend R34-million and this is the number of the beneficiaries that we have assisted in this regard.

I know it is something that we are supposed to do, but the fact that it was not reported was not something that was coming quite well to our political principal because it was the implementation of the policy and in that implementation of policy a number of processes were involved, particularly the identification then of those children so that then that can be implemented.

I am saying then there are issues that as government we are saying as a journalist even though we are working for different institutions, but there are common issues that are within us. The common issue of informing and educating the public, then the issue of raising the issues we are not saying, when a journalist is raising an issue of under-performance in government then he is actually criticising us, but we have to understand each other and find common ground of how then can we best work together.

Even though I was called in this panel to talk on the issue of poverty, I was not actually given clarity on where are the areas. But in terms of the poverty if we understand the poverty particularly in this province or particularly in South Africa, it has manifested itself in various forms and as a government we have a program then of fighting; that is why they are talking of war on poverty, of fighting that and there are initiatives that are being implemented by the government and some of those initiatives they are not

reported. We have got then our journalists who will come and report like for example the SABC, but in terms of print and even the print at a community level, you don't find that.

And as a result there is a perception that we all have to manage, be it government communicators or a journalists in an institution, the perception that we are at war but the issue is that as I was saying how do we best then strengthen our relations so that we cannot be seen as people that are at war, because I was indicating there is one thing that is common within us is to educate and to inform the public. In those few words I just wanted to end there.

THOLOE: As I said this is not designed as a chance for the panellists to come and talk to you, it is your chance now to tell us how you see it. If you are from the media you have your own ideas about what has been happening. If you are not in the media and are just an ordinary citizen you have your ideas about what is happening. This is your chance to tell some of the editors here exactly what you think of your coverage of poverty. Please introduce yourself before you speak.

RENE WIENEKUS: This is to Andrew of Daily Dispatch. I am Rene Wienekus from St Bernard's Hospice. We offer palliative care service for patients suffering from terminal illness in East London and palliative care covers poverty alleviation. My question to the Daily Dispatch since last year

we have been trying to get coverage in the Daily Dispatch about the service that we offer and we get blocked at the secretaries every single time. I have actually e-mailed you as well and it came back as unread. And then I would like to know as well, actually in today's Daily Dispatch there is an article about a patient and ARVs. When the journalists do cover stories about poverty what do they do apart from just writing that story, do they contact people in town that do offer a service and maybe ask them for their opinion or if we are aware of patients or people in the community?

MELIKAYA BUTI: My name is Melikaya Buti. I am a member of the public and a consumer of the media that is being produced and thank you for this opportunity. I just want to ask a few questions, which were mentioned as mere questions starting from Mr Steven Lang when he said that perhaps we should be asking why ... since it is obvious that the media ignores the plight of the poor, why I think it is quite a crucial question and as media people that are here I would like to know really, why is it that you know if there is a press ombudsman that gives or clarifies the roles of the ethics perhaps that should be followed and why is it continuing?

And also there was a mention of buying or consuming media because it is your choice. I would like to oppose that sometimes it is a question of diversity of the media that is there, perhaps you don't have any other choice but to buy the Daily Dispatch even if you might not necessarily agree with all the reports and everything, so, and ja in the same breath I want to

congratulate those journalists out there who have really gone an extra mile to expose a whole lot of issues. But I am kind of concerned at the same time, because it seems like we kind of get caught up at the moment you know or move with the wave, because the story ... so many stories that are being reported and they make front page covers and people respond to – and then another story comes, another big story about whatever major event you know kind of hijacks everything.

So it seems like as much as we all agree that there are loopholes between whoever I would like to know you know what kind of strategies you know that are there to make sure that government departments, the private sector, the community media and national media how are they really being ... how do they try to work together and really change those negatives that we have thank you.

THOLOE: Thank you.

BEN BAIDEN-AMPAH: My name is Ben Baiden-Ampah and I work at the WSU Journalism Department. My question is directed to the editors on the panel. I would like to know whether you have any policy, newsroom policy that help to shape the production of poverty reporting, do you have any news policy that really help production of poverty reporting.

THOLOE: [Mic not on]

FANA: I just wanted to lift up one of the questions by Melikaya that when the public, private and the NGO's are going to start working together in ensuring then that the issues of poverty are being reported that was a question but it is also then an appeal, because when we are reporting on the issues we are not only highlighting the status of poverty, but we are also maybe trying to rope in the people that can assist and then make the lives of others better, because as we are saying business, government and everyone, we cannot fight poverty alone, but when we are reporting on it, we are raising then to those who have a chance to come up and maybe pledge in one of these people and improve the lives of the people.

And then the issue I wanted to emphasise in there is we have to be honest to ourselves as a panel in saying after maybe this meeting we have to come up with a way of how do we then best work together in ensuring that the issue of partnering in reporting poverty is the issue that, as people are saying is an issue that we are going to implement thank you, Chair.

LANG: Also to Melikaya: as a consumer of the media you ask what strategies do we have to report on poverty and it depends on how you define your mission. Are you going to report on poverty because you think that this is a way of selling newspapers, or as Andrew said, is the newspaper there as your conscience? In my view although Andrew thinks that this is a good idea to have – this is, the newspaper should be your conscience – I don't think this is a good strategy simply because if I get a newspaper as a consumer and

every time I buy this newspaper it is my conscience it makes me feel guilty: “you have a full stomach; buy the newspaper now”. I am not going to buy the newspaper I have a guilt conscience big enough already.

We all have guilty consciences for some reason or the other and if I buy a newspaper that the only thing it brings to me is give me a guilty conscience I am not going to buy it, but I think that there are ways of reporting on poverty that can be interesting. Poverty reporting doesn't have to always be a depressing tale of woe, a plight of suffering. There is only so much suffering that we can deal with in our day-to-day existence, but we do need to report on it, so we need a little bit of lateral thinking on how can we do so.

And at the newspaper where I work, Grocott's Mail (I am promoting the newspaper a bit) we are running a series at the moment where we are doing profiles on young children, well they are normally Grade 11, Grade 12 learners who have come from very under-privileged backgrounds and yet in spite of this poverty background they are succeeding as learners, they are getting the scholarships. We have got, in the last few weeks we have had someone who won a local isiXhosa speaking competition, we have had someone who is working on the Square Kilometre Array astronomy project and she comes from a really impoverished background.

So the thinking behind this series is to give people inspiration to help themselves also get out of the cycle of poverty, because the town where I come from, Grahamstown, is still a very deeply divided community. There

are the white people who all live on the west side and all the black people live on the east side and there are still big divisions between the two, but at the same time there are a large number of NGOs that try and help the under-privileged side of town, but at the same time you need to have role-models and I think that having this series on achievers, achievers who have come from this under-privileged background I think it is also, it is one way of reporting on poverty, because we do describe the impoverished circumstances that these people come from.

So we are giving people in west Grahamstown an idea of the situation these people come from and we are also providing the inspiration so that they can ... people who live there can fight out of that situation that they happen to be in. There are many other ways that people can report on poverty without it always being a depressing subject. You need to dig deeper you need to do more and that type of thing. It just requires a little bit more lateral thinking and a little bit more proactive way of approaching stories, but I think that it can be done.

The other gentleman from the university's Journalism Department who asked is there a policy on shaping the production of poverty stories, no, there isn't a formal policy that does that. You know I don't have a piece of paper that says this is our policy on poverty stories, but most of the people in our news room actually come from the impoverished side of town and they are very aware of how people in their community are dealing with poverty, dealing with no garbage collection, no water and that type of thing.

And then when that happens, they are aware of the story, we report on it and then we harass the people from government to do something about it. So we feel that in a way we are reporting on poverty and we are providing a useful function in that we are expecting the people who are supposed to do something about it, the municipal authorities, we are expecting them to actually do something about it and when they don't we report on it.

THOLOE: Thanks. Wandile?

FANA: It is so unfortunate that we all sit down here and romanticise about poverty you know. To me it is like we just gathering, you know ... it is such a broad topic you know; there are always different ways of reporting poverty you know. We can be poor in terms of not having access to information and I think that is one of my qualms is that most papers are written in English you know and most papers are alienating to their readers; that is a fact.

And I was just passing through Grahamstown and I also heard from the news around Grahamstown that Grocott's Mail has always been regarded as a white paper you know and it is robbing a lot of black journalists now – and white people are saying it is a black paper you know. So I mean you need that kind of activism that people must be connected to their stories that they write about, which is, I think, one thing that we are very lucky about, because we are part of the community. We don't have 80% or 70% of the paper from

news agencies, I mean, we write about things that are here in the community, it is *about us, for us*.

I don't go out and get a story in East London because I am in Cofimvaba. I write about Cofimvaba and I think the government [inaudible] it is about time that they start looking at the advantages of using community-based media because it is the one media that is very effective, but it is less promoted, it is less promoted because there I write about something that I am very connected with you know, it is not a story that I don't have a heart for.

And yes at Skawara News we do have kind of a policy that basically we write about stories like that because those are the stories we have most of the time, that is the stories that is us. We live in a community that is very impoverished you know and we use Xhosa, no compromise you know, we use Xhosa and I think the reason why I am ... [inaudible] because it is was either sorted out by one of the ... [inaudible] they always do that. If they see a big paper, a good paper coming out they always buy it out.

But the most important vital thing is, is that language is a carrier of culture. You know if you have got a paper that has got language needs, it gets connected to the people. The Daily Dispatch must try it out, they must have one page or two pages in Xhosa and tell me, trust me you will lose a lot of white buyers but you will get more black ones.

THOLOE: [Mic not on]

TRENCH: To the rep from St Bernard's: I am terribly sorry you had that experience and we will have a chat afterwards and we can set that right. On the issue around the ARV story, I mean ja we do ... I mean we do speak to people that are involved in that I mean that is how we got the story. How we found people who had some connection to the experience of people supposedly smoking these ARV drugs, but I mean to get back to the ... I mean some of the points that have been raised, I think the issue that Steven picked up on for me is also very valid and it is one of the things that I have also thought about. There is a danger in reporting around issues and people who are in poverty or poor as the stereotype and it is something that I am aware of.

It is depressing that every story that has a backdrop like that involves casting that kind of central character as a victim, someone needy, wanting someone else to fix it for them and I mean it shouldn't be that way because I think Steven is right as well, there are also many other examples of stories of hope that come out of those kinds of circumstances and those backgrounds and we have had a few of them in the paper, though not as many as we should have.

I think Melikaya's point about the public/private partnership is also I think relevant. For people that are in journalism it is something that I have started reading about quite a lot over the last year or two. There is something called the "civil journalism movement" which seeks to kind of do that, to do things like this in ways very directly involving people in

communities where media plays a role in listening to voices, creating debate and going one step further than describing problems and actually helping in some way to get people to find solutions to some of these problems.

And I think what we are seeing in South Africa now is a growing awareness within the media that it is not enough to sort of sit on the sidelines as media or as citizens, that it is time for everybody to get more actively involved in public life and public debate and issues that affect the lives of the citizens.

In terms of a policy on poverty reporting, no we don't have one of those. The way we have approached every story that has involved whether from Frere or you know Ben Mafane of Glenmore walking off to smash a High Court window to get noticed, to get his community noticed, is simply on the basis of, is it a good story, is it a story about someone that people will care about?

And just to sort of qualify what I said earlier about some of the stories that we put on the front page of the paper and I mean they didn't sell like hot cakes, but they did okay, but the one thing that came out of those stories in almost every single one of them was an overwhelming response from readers. I mean sometimes it is absolutely, it is extremely moving, to be on the receiving end in a newsroom after a story like that has been published.

I mean we had a story just the other day about kids fainting in a school, they were fainting from hunger. Their families were so poor that they hadn't eaten for three days and that was on the front page of the paper. By

the next day there had been so much response to that story that those kids were being fed every single day and the school was being sorted out as a response from readers, not necessarily all wealthy readers. And I think that is an important part. I mean when I was talking about the conscience it is not so much saying you feel guilty, but it is also saying that here is something that you can change and I mean to illustrate another point, I am sorry I hope I am not going on too much?

The last two years or so we have done a huge amount of reporting around the collapse of school feeding schemes at primary schools around the province and one of the first stories that we wrote about was in the face of that story was a school ... [inaudible] and the story was built around a couple of little kids talking about starvation that was for real, because a state program had collapsed. The response for that particular school was so incredible, the amount of ... the resources and opportunities that have been injected into that school as a result, from our readers, has been phenomenal but also I must say as well not just by our readers, but by the staff of the newspaper.

Staff in our company responded just like our readers did and collected cash and clothes and stuff for the school and I think it is part of what it is all about. It is like, newspapers aren't just observers of poverty or observers of society; I mean we are also staffed by people who are in the community and when a community responds I think it is important for us to really respond with them and to try and make a difference in a real fundamental way.

THOLOE: [Mic not on]

VUYANI MQINGWANA: I feel very uncomfortable that I come in at this juncture. I am Vuyani Mqingwana, History Department, Walter Sisulu University. I am not sure to what extent it is embarrassing to be here, because when I am here I am amongst people who think the way I do. We are talking about the poverty and the poor and I guess I would have to take off my spectacles if I wanted to see the poor amongst us.

I should think we are victims of what has made us what we are and I am not sure to what extent we draw our inspiration from the kind of historical experience that we have had. I am always struck by the kind of Christian conspiracy which tends to make us feel that we need to ascribe our existence to some kind of force that is beyond our control.

We are talking about the poor and it becomes clear to me when you make the kind of examples that would come from somebody who is promoting the national Lotto that continues playing, because in the final analysis you may also win and therefore abandon the poor and become part of the rich. To say that the fresh story is about human beings is more descriptive than explanatory and I should think we need the kind of media that is going to explain the existence of poverty, the sources of poverty, how there is a strong relationship between poverty and power and authority and privilege and opportunity.

Now we are journalists and I would dare say even if we are not journalists we are part and parcel of the problem and we unfortunately live in a society where we are not aware of our existence as a program, whether you are black or white, poverty ... [inaudible] have been caused by historical forces that emphasise racism. Now we as journalists singing praises to those we even call some of them ... [inaudible] and we are supposed to look up to these people as the pace-setters in the same way in which achievers from poor background are regarded as models, because we are provided with the opportunity to legitimise our own existence as the wealthy people, as people whose existence depends on the existence of poverty.

I want to say I didn't want to come in a manner that would sort of disturb the thinking processes of some people, because I am aware that we are all thinkers here. But it is the kind of thinking that we practice that needs to be interrogated, unless we stop this practice of pretending that we represent people who cannot speak for themselves, we will continue moving in the direction of the poor and the rich ... the poor and the rich, because it is exactly that kind of relationship that justifies our own existence and then we can look to our Judeo-Christian background to say: oh no, these things are justified in terms of what the scriptures are saying.

GAVIN STEWART: Gavin Stewart is my name and I certainly don't want to make a case against the media for reporting poverty, in fact I want to agree with Andrew that what is needed is really a much broader debate. I want to

point out three simple pieces of research: the one is that there is a direct correlation between the amount of education a person has and the money they earn. The more education you have the more money you make, absolutely proven everywhere in the world, but demonstrated again in South Africa recently.

The second one is that your success in agriculture is directly proportional to your years of education. So again education is the issue. There is Sheena Duncan, Sheena Duncan spent a lot of her life working for the Black Sash and the poor and she was hysterically opposed to grants, because she says grants breed inertia, grants are a first aid measure they are not a long term measure.

So out of all the issues around poverty – and they are immense and they are hugely complex – and that is why I think Andrew's idea of a continuing debate is absolutely critical, because you can't begin to get there. Just to take one slight example: what we are told is if we nationalise the banks and made loans easier for the poor then the poor would prosper the banks would prosper and life would be better, but that is exactly what the present financial crash in capitalism has been caused by – easy loans, which people couldn't repay when the economy took a downturn and now the banks are being nationalised.

So it is a curiosity that socialism and capitalism have ended up in the same place, both wanting to nationalise the banks, the one at the beginning, the other at the end. But the truth is that when Mamphela Ramphela – or in

fact Wendy Luhabe said it and Mamphela Ramphele agreed to it – when they say that the present educational system is worse than Bantu education that is a terrifying thought and what is most terrifying about it and you need to read the whole of Wendy Luhabe’s comments, which you can get on The Time’s website, is that education is failing and it is particularly failing in the rural areas and it is failing disastrously you have only got to drive through the rural areas over a wide space to see how many kids are on the streets in school uniforms at 10 and 11 o’clock in the morning, because the teachers have given up.

You have only got to speak to people who work there and if I were to focus on one issue I would say it was education anywhere outside the cities including the former townships, including the rural areas because that is one long-term answer. In fact I have a friend at Rhodes who says we should call off the 2010 Soccer World Cup and just worry about education, symbolically that would be a very powerful gesture, but that is where we need, if we are going to focus, because Steven is right if we just tell sad stories about the terrible hardships people suffer nobody is going to read the paper except the poor people suffering, but nobody wants to read about them over a long term, unless people can actually do something.

And unfortunately running out and handing clothing and tins of food to one desperate school doesn’t solve the school feeding scream across the province. If you go into the deep Transkei nothing is happening. Thank you Chair.

THOLOE: [Mic not on.]

HAPPY BONGOZA: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Happy Bongoza, the station manager of Inkonjane Community Radio. Firstly I must highlight that I am a bit disturbed, Father Joe, because it is said to be the Journalism Dialogue, but I note that our sector is not represented, mainly we are focussing on the print and even on the print it is a faction of the print, because community media is not represented in this dialogue. [Wandile Fana points out that he represents community media]. Are you from the one ...? Excuse me. I am so happy to hear that, please, very happy.

Now I want to pose my questions to both the editors and government. From the editors: can they explain or just give us a brief description of on how are they influenced by current affairs, particularly politics, competition for selling or profit-making interests in their editorial, because I believe mostly to a certain extent that is the cases that influence them on what to cover and to what an extent to cover it. And to you Mr Maswana: I noted your concern about the media only covering or mostly covering the negative parts of poverty, ignoring the positive things that you do as government to improve the lives of the people.

To what extent as government do you make sure that the information, the activities, the events that we are doing are available to the media. Do they ignore them even if you make them available to them or you just expect

that no because we are doing it they must follow us, so that we are sure that you are tackling them fairly thank you very much.

THOLOE: Let's start again with you Gcobani.

MASWANA: Thanks Chair. Let me start with you Happy. In terms of us as government profiling the issue of poverty and trying then to link or build relations with the media, we communicate with almost every community newspaper or community radio station and the broader print or electronic media and the response I want to agree with you, the response that we are getting from the community media and particularly in the areas of the former Transkei is very positive and it is really assisting us as government.

But on that score in terms of then having your media, your directory, you find some you don't get your ... because there are a number of community newspapers, particularly newspapers in the province. We don't have then the ... you don't get all of them and we want to make a maximum impact using all of them, be it an advert or whatever but we do send to all those who are within our directory ... and even then yours, Happy, we will be utilising it very frequently.

We try then to send to each and every ... if you want to stretch your wings then that is what we are trying to do. But you know there is this culture when I arrived in government if you send to Daily Dispatch, SABC and blah, blah you are kind of done, but I am trying to instil then the culture in people to

utilise the community print and the electronic media most. You raised a number of issues, I know the issue that this kind of dialogue it must not end today, it must be something that we continue and I think it is very critical and important, because that is where we can also find where each other is, because it was only last year I don't know ... ja it was last year when ... in the State of the Nation address Mr Gavin Stewart when the president was saying we need to even come up with the division of poverty.

So if the people, whilst the people are poor we are struggling in South Africa to define what is it that is ... we mean about poverty and this year they come up with another approach of saying as a government we are saying where are these people that are poor. So which means we are looking for a database and that is why we have this kind of door-to-door because we are saying if we are going to budget for these people, where are they, who are you giving to ... because one thing that we are giving is the grant and we are saying the social grant is not assisting us in terms of fighting poverty, we have to include other means of fighting poverty.

But these things also if you want to identify these people you need to report those things of people that are not easily identified. I think then the strive or the initiatives that are being taken by the government are going to assist us, but just to conclude in what ... [inaudible] saying the explanation of the existence of poverty it is very critical, because even in government you know what is happening if you report on the children that are suffering, going to bed without food they will go to the issue of no Department of Education,

the nutrition program etc. It doesn't address all the problems in there, but there are various government departments that have a kind of intervention strategy to assist those children there, but they are not coming up, because in the Department of Social Development and SASSA there is what we call those people who are vulnerable and distressed if the person cannot ... so the social relief of distress that is there and that kind of money sometimes if it is not being reported the social relief of distress itself, is not being reported as a government we under-spend, because we are saying we cannot identify these people.

So the report on the issue it becomes important I am saying we will really have to have this continuous debate in ensuring that we understand each other in terms of defining poverty and also identifying these poor people, because when we work together it is where we can maybe win this war we will say as a government we are ... [inaudible] and we cannot just win then this war if we are fighting it alone. Thanks Chair.

THOLOE: Steven I don't think Gcobani has tackled the question of where we sit, our very patronising attitude towards the poor, our very mindset about poverty I think that was the basic question that was being asked here, do you think you can tackle that one Steven?

LANG: That is a tough one.

THOLOE: Ja.

LANG: This is the question posed by the gentleman from the Walter Sisulu University, right? And I wasn't sure about some aspects of what he was saying about whether the very fact that we are sitting here is promoting poverty in some indirect way or not or whether it is really a problem of being patronising or not. And you have a point, I mean we are being patronising in that we set ourselves up to speak for the voiceless and what gave us this right to speak for the voiceless? But you know this is what we do and we have an imperative, we run a newspaper and the mandate that is given to, the newspaper that I am working on at the moment has a mandate to reflect the community and a large part of the community in Grahamstown is poor.

So yes you could argue what right do I have to speak on their behalf, well I don't actually speak on their behalf. We send reporters who live in the community and they actually interview the people who come from the most impoverished sections. One of our most popular sections in the newspaper every week is what we call a Vox Pops where we go around and talk to people about a whole lot of various issues.

And we are painstakingly careful about making sure that the people that we speak to are representative of the broader community, so it is not us who are putting words into their mouth or patronising them, maybe to a degree we are, but we do make a concerted effort to get the voice of the

people to actually ... let them speak in their own voices, whether that actually addresses your concern or not, I suspect not, but we do make an effort.

Joe if you will excuse me I would like to just say something else to address a concern from Happy about radio. Before I joined Grocott's Mail in January this year, before that I worked at the SABC for twenty one years in that period, in the last two years I worked at SAfm and one of the imperatives imposed upon us by Snuki Zikalala was he insisted that we have what he called "development stories" every day. And this was law. You know we hear about other things about black-lists and whatever in the media, but what has never been reported on is that he said: you will have stories on development journalism. And initially people were not very happy with this, because the interpretation was, well if it is development journalism it is about poor people in the country and, ah who cares about them?

But he was very insistent and laid down the law and he made people draw up diaries, this is your development diary and each region in the whole country had to provide a diary of which development story they would be doing over the next month or so and I was working on the current affairs shows and we were instructed: you will play these stories as well.

And it is true there was certain reluctance and when you are doing current affairs it is always easier to drop the soft stories and make way for the hard news stories and there is always that temptation. This was resolved by saying that we have a slot, this is a slot every day at 25 past 6, you will play the development story and that is it. And what actually came of it was some

of the best stories that we ever had on the current affair shows were those development stories. Why? Because the assignment editors gave them more time to do those stories. So yes it wasn't hard news, it wasn't breaking news, because the reporters had enough time to go into the more rural areas to spend time with the local community and invariably they would seek out the poorest of the poor and try and work out what their problems are.

And very often they produced fantastic stories, sound-rich stories, interesting stories. You know a very local story that affects only a tiny little community can be very interesting to the whole country as well. Wandile said that community journalism is great for reporting on problems affecting the poor and that is true, I agree with you. I think that community journalism by and large – radio and print – does reflect on-the-ground issues better than national journalism, but it can be done well and if you have a good storyteller, someone who has a certain amount of empathy with the subject at hand, it can be done very well.

And incidentally, we had a community station in Grahamstown and it just disintegrated, I am sure ... that is another story right.

THOLOE: Wandile?

FANA: [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON: Anyone?

FANA: Okay I will just make an input as well that I think what strategies we as newspapers would think that we can develop help the public and poor. You know I also found that working with NGOs is very important because they are people that are doing the ground work. If maybe all of us can start almost every edition or report on certain NGOs and what the work they do and their aspirations and problems then in that sense we would be able to deal with the poor in an objective way not in a biased or other way.

THOLOE: Thank you.

TRENCH: Just one thing. This general point about patronising the poor is probably generally correct although I would also like to share my own experience and I think anyone that has worked in the Dispatch newsroom and I am sure Gavin would attest to this as well is that in my experience the poor certainly in our community are quite capable of speaking for themselves. I mean I often find it is on the door of the newspaper that they often turn to first to tell their own story. I mean all the stories that I have cited tonight by and large originated from the poor speaking their own story; you know we didn't go out saying "you know is there a poor person whose story we can tell".

They came to us and said this is my story and you will tell it, because it is important and you know we listened to it and we did it. I think if we look to the example of a very specific story like Ben Mafane of Glenmore it is

incredible. I mean this is a guy who kind of symbolises, he actually breaks that stereotype that the poor have no voice. A guy who walked from Glenmore to Grahamstown and threw a rock through a High Court window to get the authorities to listen to the issues of his community, I mean I am not saying that this is what people should do go throw rocks through court windows, but I mean it shows you that newspapers say we would like to give a voice to the voiceless but you know we are not their voice.

I mean we give a voice to the voiceless who have got something to say and who want to talk to us about it. Sometimes I think newspapers err in not actively seeking those voices, but I think that the poor are capable of making noise and making themselves heard, it is a question of who is listening and how are we prepared to tell those stories when they come to tell them to us.

THOLOE: I think you will probably be the last person from the floor who will speak.

UNKNOWN MALE: You are giving me the impression that you expect the poor to come to the media people, and not you going to the media people that is the impression you are giving me.

TRENCH: No.

UNKNOWN MALE: You see the point is this, the point, the position I am taking you have to find a way of assessing those who are actually experiencing poverty. You see if you send your journalist to the field right he can cut corners. I mean you are not there as an editor; you see he can cut corners and in fact some of them do. Now he is under pressure to bring the story to you right away, so he goes there, he wouldn't have sufficient time to really interview those who really matter. He samples one or two views or he goes to officials and finds out from them how they are solving poverty problems and he comes and presents the story to you, because from my own observation not much is being done to really access those who are really experiencing poverty.

What you have been doing, especially the mainstream media, you go to those who live in the mainstream society and then assess, I mean interview, them and then go and write about them, but those who are really poor are those who are living in the rural areas, they are happy to ... [inaudible] travelling outside. When I was in Transkei I sent them to the rural areas and we really saw ... [inaudible].

When you cover poverty you cover them because you expect the stories to arouse sympathy that is what you do, stories that don't arouse sympathy you don't care for them. This is the way ...

TRENCH: Sorry I will just come in there. Your view is that it is a negative thing for a newspaper to publish a story that we anticipate will have a sympathetic reaction?

UNKNOWN MALE: Ja, because ...

TRENCH: That is just ridiculous. I am sorry.

UNKNOWN MALE: No it is not ridiculous because the fact of the matter that is a reality the ... [inaudible] buy the papers are those people who can afford to read the papers and it is not those who can ... [inaudible] and those who can afford to buy the newspapers are relatively not those who belong to that ... [inaudible] of poverty. We are thinking about Daily Dispatch I mean ... [inaudible]. You don't serve the lower income.

TRENCH: In fact let me point out what we actually do. I just want to put you in the picture here just so that you understand it. Like as an example, one of the projects that we have done this year, we actually produce a free newspaper, which goes to 30,000 households in Mdantsane in particular in an area that we know that there are people who cannot afford to buy the paper. We do a weekly summary of the newspaper, which we produce and give away free of charge there is no advertising in it, it makes no money we do it as part of ensuring ...

[Talking simultaneously.]

THOLOE: I am getting very worried that this is developing into a dialogue between the two of you. Ladies and gentlemen I think for me this has been a very rewarding experience. I am trying to wrap up. This has been a rewarding experience. I am going to ask the panellists each to give us a 30 second comment before we close.

MASWANA: Thank you Chair. Mine will be I move with the idea of maybe if we want to report on poverty then we need to have the people that are going to be in the areas where the poverty is happening and in other areas then the government, as a government we can partner with the media institutions and ensure that we come up with the ... even if it is not a positive story that is reporting on poverty, but a story that will highlight the extent of poverty in our community so that that is one area that we are saying in the Eastern Cape the poverty is not actually reported in the manner that is actually ... in a manner that is saying that is exactly what is happening in the Eastern Cape thank you.

THOLOE: Okay Steven?

LANG: One quick comment. I would like to mention the fact that although Grahamstown is a deeply divided community, our newspaper Grocott's Mail

sells equally well on both sides of the divide, which is quite gratifying. It is something that we have aimed for, which means that maybe we please half the people on each side or maybe antagonise half the people on each side; I am not quite sure yet, but you know you always lose if you try and please all of the people all of the time, somebody said that I am not sure whom ... Bob Marley? Okay.

But I think one of the interesting points that the gentleman from Walter Sisulu said is that you don't see anyone in poverty here. Perhaps that is a proposal for the next Dialogue is that we should have a Dialogue in a situation where there are people who can represent the poor; that is another proposal. You know we are in a very nice comfortable environment here and we have all had our three square meals today, maybe the next one won't be in a situation like that.

FANA: Okay my last words will be basically that poverty is a very relative and you know we are not supposed to only treat poverty as misery. There can be poverty, there can be dignity in poverty as well and as much as the Transkei is very poor, the community structures, people are actually people with aspirations and dreams, so the way to balance it, I think we need we as newspapers to start working with NGOs a lot so that we can actually understand the people at the grassroots. Thank you very much.

THOLOE: Andrew?

TRENCH: Okay just to wrap up from my side, I have heard what has been said about explaining sources of poverty and relationships to power etc. etc. and I mean hopefully like the greater minds in academia will help us understand that. For me, we will approach poverty as journalists and for me, poverty is not the story, quite simply as I think we have tried to do and tried to show, it is people that are the story. It is not an issue, it is a human story and I am sorry if that sounds trite and not deep enough but actually those are the stories that do move people. It is not a description of an issue, it is a description of a circumstance that someone is experiencing. That is all from my side.

THOLOE: Thank you. We have had a fantastic panel and a fantastic audience. Over to you Mike.

SCHMIDT: Thanks Joe and thanks to our panel and our audience. There have been some really challenging questions as well. It is really good to hear that people are thinking, particularly journalists – producers of knowledge, supposedly – that we are thinking along these lines that does not reduce the poor who are the majority of our people to mere statistics or ciphers. The United Nations has just changed its poverty definition after a period of twenty five years to, I think, people living below \$1,25 a day rather \$1,00 and all of a sudden they are shocked that there are a hell of a lot more poor people than they thought there were previously.

I think those are the sort of ciphers that Gcobani was mentioning, but they are clearly, they are us, they are out there, they live in our communities, they are the majority of our people and I am glad to see that we are interrogating that. I think the gentleman from WSU put his finger on it and I am going to be rude here by agreeing with him in that there is a causal relationship between wealth and poverty and I dare say a parasitic relationship: the one lives off the other and I don't think we can ignore that.

I don't think we can ignore that equation in this country least of all, but I am very glad as well that we are talking about real people, real stories. Turning back to the issue at hand of journalism you will notice in your press packs you have got a couple of things there, the press codes of ... the Press and Broadcasting Codes of Conduct that we mentioned at the beginning also a little booklet on the Press Council and a draft constitution for a proposed new Professional Journalists' Association, which is supposed to be a new national body.

We are in the bizarre situation of being the only country in the SADC region that doesn't have a functioning professional journalists' association. This has arisen out of various circumstances including the collapse of the old South African Union of Journalists and what I am talking about is not a trade union, I am talking about a body that will be a centre of excellence, an organ that will transfer skills to emerging journalists in particular that will defend free speech and the profession – although I kind of like to call it the trade and some people think “profession” is a bit too snooty.

But nevertheless the draft constitution is out there; the idea has been endorsed by the regional body, the Southern African Journalists' Association, and has also been endorsed by SANEF. The media owners are a little bit more nervous of the project: they think we are going to veer in the direction trade unionism but that is not the intention. We really want to focus on quality journalism and the upliftment of the profession and the upliftment of emerging journalists in particular.

Give it some thought. I have just been chatting before this Dialogue to Joe and he is saying you know we have been promoting this idea the whole year so it is time that we actually get together with those who have agreed to the project and establish a bit of a working committee to work towards to getting this Professional Journalists' Association launched, so give it some thought and I am open to feedback: bouquets, brickbats, throw them at me, it is fine. I will take all of that on board. It is important that this thing is organic and that it be driven by journalists.

So thank you again so much for coming. It is really great to see such a nice turnout. You have done yourselves proud and I know the debate ... by all of the chattering behind me I can tell the debate just isn't going to stop when I shut up, which is fantastic, so carry on. Alright thanks for coming.