

women's



media watch

Contact: Women's Media Watch
Mediaworks
6th Floor, Norlen House
17 Buitenkant Street
Cape Town 8000
South Africa
Tel: +27 21 461-0368
Fax: +27 21 461-0385
E-mail: mediawat@mediawks.co.za

editor: Gabrielle Le Roux
deputy editor: Crystal Orderson
layout: Nadya Glawé

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NEWSLETTER making waves

no. 9 september 1999

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The banner reads: Pay up or go to jail. Women on farms march for maintenance rights



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on-air challenge to a sexist dj

by: Crystal Orderson

Nigel Pearce (not his real name) is on air every day between 9.00am and 12.00 midday...he hosts one of the most popular shows on Cape Town's so-called number 1 station, Good Hope FM. Some people call him loud and obnoxious. Earlier this year Women's Media Watch received a complaint from a member of the public that he frequently made very sexist, homophobic and fat-phobic remarks and jokes and that he made very discriminatory comments about sex-workers.

media still stereotypes women too often and that they should move away from describing women primarily in terms of how sexy or desirable they are. Nigel argued that, for example, his female co-presenter (who did not take part in the discussion) does not mind being called a "sexy thang", on air, nor does she regard this as sexual harassment. He also said that often women play into the stereotype of what men want them to be. Gabrielle pointed out that because of unequal power relations between men and women, women are

often under enormous pressure to take harassment at work very lightly.

She added that the media is committed to reflect society in all its diversity and move away from seeing women just as caregivers, victims and "sexy things". She pointed out that it gets very boring to be told for the hundredth time by a man you find unattractive that he finds your body desirable. It also encourages other employers towards this behaviour when they hear radio presenters behaving in this way.

This led to Nigel asking what role he could play. Gabrielle said that as a popular presenter he plays an important role in shaping people's attitudes....she then reversed the question and asked what role he felt he played. Nigel said it was not his role to act as a priest and he can only do so much. His job is to entertain people. He added that he does speak out against rape and violence against women but

cannot speak about issues like sexual harassment every day because he works for a music-driven station. He added that he attends events that highlight these issues and speaks out against rape.

They spoke about what it meant to be controversial - it is not unusual for male presenters to justify their sexism in terms of seeing themselves as controversial. Gabrielle suggested that in a sexist and homophobic society it is not controversial or cutting-edge to be sexist and homophobic.

She encouraged him to see his role in a more creative manner, complimenting him on a programme where he challenged racism by phoning up a Sea Point landlord who had a flat to rent. He put on a Cape Flats accent and was told that the flat was not available. He then called again using an English accent and was invited to come and view it immediately. During this programme he had used his role as entertainer to amusingly point out a very serious problem and educate people about it in an entertaining way. Gabrielle encouraged him to do the same with other issues.

Although some listeners perceive him as very sexist and homophobic these are not labels he welcomes and he committed himself to trying to be more aware of the problems that exist in society.

The programme was well received and there were several calls to the station and to Women's Media Watch afterwards to say that it was good to hear the presenter being challenged on

his attitudes.

At Women's Media Watch we are now calling for the same presenter to have gender training. When this suggestion was put to the BCCSA it was not welcomed, we were informed by Malan Otto that it was an insulting suggestion. He said that he, as a member of the BCCSA, would be horrified if someone suggested he needed gender training and he would expect presenters to feel the same.

This has led to our closer scrutiny of the role and members of the BCCSA and concern over what we are finding. If the SABC is to be self-regulatory - the purpose of the BCCSA - then the regulatory body needs to consist of responsible people who are committed to implementing the written non-discriminatory policy of the corporation. This includes their policy to be non-sexist and to end gender stereotyping.

There is clearly a huge gap in understanding on the part of a number of entertainers that their shows do influence opinion and that if they actively promote discrimination against certain groups it flies in the face of the SA

If the SABC is to be self-regulatory - the purpose of the BCCSA - then the regulatory body needs to consist of responsible people who are committed to implementing the written non-discriminatory policy of the corporation.

Constitution, in spite of freedom of expression, and is irresponsible. It also flies in the face of the SABC's own little known Policy on Women.

Although some listeners perceive him as very sexist and homophobic these are not labels he welcomes and he committed himself to trying to be more aware of the problems that exist in society.

Women's Media Watch took up the complaints with the station concerned and also complained to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, IBA who referred us to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa, BCCSA. One of the outcomes was that the Women's Media Watch was invited to be part of one of Nigel Pearce's programmes in order to speak to him about these issues on air. Their discussion covered a wide range of issues and certainly broke the mold of his usual programmes.

Nigel and Gabrielle discussed sexual harassment, stereotyping of women and how the media and his show in particular can play a role in changing negative attitudes to women.

Gabrielle told Nigel that the

The Internet has become the future in communication. Statistics show that although most of the developed world is connected to the Internet, Africa as a continent is not as lucky. Three African countries have no access to the Internet, while connecting to the world wide web remains an expensive luxury for the rest of us. Connecting to international sites from Africa takes longer and unfortunately the majority of sites are hosted in developed countries.

So, do we ignore the Internet in Africa or do we find a way to keep up to date? That remains a question that is not often debated as the power of this technology is largely in the hands of multinationals who need to make a profit. This was shown at a conference recently held in Grahamstown which was hosted by Rhodes University.

The conference entitled "The Internet, Media and Development", brought together journalists, web designers and other media workers (like myself) to discuss the potential of the Internet in our society. It aimed to start a debate around the effects of globalisation, using HTML (the language of the Internet) in the workplace and to look at how the internet has been used for development organisations.

Each day started with a plenary session and continued with practical workshops aimed to transfer skills in online journalism, web design and Information management to name but a few. On the whole the workshops were the most fulfilling part of the conference as it gave delegates the chance to

learn about web design and how to use the various components of the technology, for example search engines.

On the other hand, the conference missed the opportunity of merging technology and development as a focal point. Plenary sessions were dominated by the important service providers (companies who offer the connection to the Internet in South Africa) and could have been mistaken for a trade fair. In this way they successfully missed the dilemma of the African context and the potential for using the Internet as a creative means of empowerment.

The Internet is the future whether Africa is on board or not. It has been successfully used in Francophone Africa to make and distribute radio programmes to community radio stations as well as diagnosing illnesses.

The potential for the rest of Africa, if they get connected, is vast. The Internet complements the idea of an African Renaissance and should become vital in our communication with the world. The West tends to portray Africa only as poverty-stricken and war-ridden - effective information sharing on the Internet about the diverse African realities could reverse this stereotype.

Anthea Carolus, who wrote this article, co-ordinated the 1999 Mediaworks Gender and Communication Course which offered basic gender, media and communication skills to participants from a variety of organisations. If you would like to know more about the course for next year, please contact Anthea at Mediaworks 4610368.

by: Crystal Orderson

Important women's organisation, Ilitha Labantu, recently held a conference at the Sea Point Civic Centre to look at the main causes of

FAMSA. They discussed how to mobilize men on gender violence and shared the work they do in rehabilitating perpetrators of violence.



Ilitha Labantu awareness raising bumper sticker

domestic violence and to get men confronting gender violence and being part of the solution. Lulu Nongalaza, manager of Ilitha Labantu described the event as a huge success.

Main concerns

Delegates at the conference expressed concern about the high incidence of violence against women. Practical issues were discussed like what to do if you as a neighbour or friend

More than 100 people attended and the conference was opened by Deputy President Jacob Zuma and attended by several other Parliamentarians.

Nongalaza says that although the media was there in full force they only attended for Zuma's speech. She found this very discouraging because the content of the conference and the diversity of participants was important to reflect, but the media missed the point.

Programme

The first panel discussion was between a variety of religious leaders.

Another important area under discussion was the impact of gender violence on the economy. Editor of the Cape Times, Ryland Fisher discussed the impact of cultural diversity.

The day ended with a panel from the organisation

Do you go to the house and confront the abuser, or do you go to the police and report the matter? And what about the fear that the abuser might confront you later and that you might be harassed? Participants wanted to know what kind of protection there is for them if they report these cases.

notice that domestic violence is taking place. Do you go to the house and confront the abuser, or do you go to the police and report the matter? And what about the fear that the abuser might confront you later and that you might be harassed? Participants wanted to know what kind of protection there is for them if they report these cases.

This was the first conference here that included men and how they feel about domestic violence.

For more information or to get a copy of the conference report please phone Ilitha Labantu.

women on farms launch maintenance campaign

by: Crystal Orderson

The Women on Farms project based in Stellenbosch recently launched their Child Private Maintenance Campaign. Part of the campaign was to hold pickets and the first one was held at Stellenbosch Magistrates Court.

The aim of the picket was to highlight and raise awareness around the problems women experience when applying for Private Maintenance; to highlight the behaviour of maintenance officials towards applicants; to educate women and the broader community around the new Private Maintenance legislation; and to lobby the government to implement the amendments to the Private Maintenance Act.

Women struggle to get maintenance from fathers

In trying to understand the problems women face in receiving money from the fathers of their children we are sharing a case study of a woman in the Stellenbosch area.

Ronel Adams and her four children live with Ronel's mother Katrina on a farm in the Stellenbosch area. The father of three of the kids, Johannes has been contributing R100 per month for two of the children via the Maintenance Court in Stellenbosch. He also pays R100 per month for the youngest child directly to Katrina.

But Johannes began paying quite late. The latest date that maintenance can be paid is seven days after the end of the month, Johannes was paying three weeks after the end of the month. Ronel went to the maintenance

officer to complain and Johannes was subpoenaed to court.

When they appeared in Court the Magistrate's official, Mrs Lavagne, behaved in a way that was very discriminatory and not in keeping with the spirit or letter of the law. She pretended not to know why he had been subpoenaed.

When Ronel explained why they were present the court official rudely replied that she should keep her thighs closed and not make children with men who she would then expect maintenance from afterwards.

Ronel was also misinformed by the Maintenance officer when she told him that Johannes was in arrears and had not paid maintenance since June. He responded by saying that it wasn't necessary for the father to pay since the application had not been finalised yet and that Ronel should first go and look for employment herself before the application could be finalised. He implied that the matter would take five months when in fact it should not exceed three.

Ronel was deeply humiliated and enraged by the combination of misinformation and rudeness she had experienced. She rightly feels that something should be done to change the way in which officers treat beneficiaries who have the right to approach the maintenance court if there is a problem with payment of maintenance.

The court officials rudeness had further repercussions for her as Johannes went back

to the farm and spread the word that she was cheap amongst her male co-workers, who have treated her disrespectfully since.

Campaign demands

Women working on farms or living in rural areas experience unemployment and poverty and their poorly recognised status is made worse by their lack of the sort of education and skills needed to make it in today's labour market and society.

Many households are headed by single mothers separated from their partners and due to the fact that most women are employed as casual workers on farms, their livelihood (and that of their children) is dependent on private maintenance.

In November 1998 amendments were made to the Private Maintenance Act in an effort to provide interim relief to women applying for private maintenance. The amendments brought hope to women struggling to secure maintenance from father who renege on their responsibility to contribute to their children's upbringing. Although this Act gave women rights on paper, it has not been translated into real rights yet.

The following are amendments made to the Act which need to be implemented urgently:

1. The appointment of a maintenance investigator. The responsibility of locating the defendant's home and employment address has shifted from applicant to the maintenance investigator. The new Act clearly states that each maintenance court should employ a maintenance investigator.
2. The use of the Garnishee Order when a maintenance order is granted. This allows

the maintenance court to make an order directing an employer to deduct maintenance payments from an employee's salary.

3. The granting of maintenance orders by defaulters. The inclusion of this provision in the Act was prompted by the continued non-appearance of respondents despite their knowledge of subpoenas issued requesting their presence in court.

One year later

One year has passed and the amended Act has still not been implemented. Women experience humiliation and degradation at several Maintenance Offices due to the unacceptable behaviour of maintenance officials. They often leave the court unsuccessful in their attempts to secure maintenance for their children and therefore refuse in future to apply. In addition, they lose a day's wages when visiting the maintenance court.

This process of applying is in itself disempowering for women since they feel that although there is legislation in place to alleviate the problems of maintenance, their right to apply is violated by the lack of implementation.

The Women on Farms Project demands that the President intervene: Announce the implementation of the Amendments as soon as possible. Direct the Department of Justice to establish a Committee to oversee and monitor the implementation process. The Committee should consult with all role players involved and effected by the Act to discuss ways in which the amendments could be implemented. They also demand the re-training of maintenance officials to apply the Act in an informed way and to be gender sensitive.