

News publishers turn to neighbours

Participants at the African Media Leaders Forum in Dakar, Senegal, on Friday, 9 November 2012, heard how twinning partnerships between African newspapers, and newspapers elsewhere, are leading the way to developing successful business strategies and strengthening financial independence of the media.

A panel discussion organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) revealed how newspapers working across emerging markets are benefitting practically - and financially - from partnership exchanges, while at the same time challenging global perceptions of development support to media in Africa.

The partnerships are a different approach to media development that take advantage of WAN-IFRA's vast network of news media professionals to exchange experiences and share best practices and expertise.

"Nobody can do everything by themselves - you need to cooperate," said Fred M'membe, managing director and editor-in-chief of the *Zambia Post*, one of the panel participants.

A core driver of success

Larry Kilman, deputy CEO of WAN-IFRA, who moderated the discussion, said: "It is no secret that collaboration within the newspaper industry is a core driver of success and growth, and WAN-IFRA's membership has demonstrated a great commitment to this exchange."

The other panellists included: Anders Goliger, news editor of the *Göteborgs-Posten* of Sweden, which conducted a three-year 'twinning' project with the *Zambia Post*; Vincent Kahiya, editor-in-chief of Alpha Media Holdings in Zimbabwe, which is 'twinning' with the BNL Times of neighbouring Malawi; Dr. Tikhala Chibwana, general manager of the BNL Times; Kate Collins, managing director for Emerging Platforms & Products for the Star Media Group in Canada, which provides advisory services to the Zimbabwe-Malawi project; and Ingrid Louw, director of Print & Digital Media South Africa.

"The twinning programme was a godsend as it came at a time when our newspaper business was undergoing major transformation and growth," said Kahiya. "The joint sessions we've had in Harare, Johannesburg and Blantyre have opened up a new world that shows how media houses in the region can learn from each other and co-operate on major projects."

Effective instruments

Partnering senior media professionals from news organisations in non-competing markets has produced successful business and development opportunities across the continent. Twinning initiatives between newspapers are effective instruments for business and editorial knowledge transfer, with co-operation aimed at assisting media to develop their

economic and financial sustainability and better prepare for future challenges.

"It is essential for Africa and African business to create sufficient 'collective consciousness' to enable us to respond strategically to the challenges on the continent," said Louw, which has closely followed the impact of the twinning programme. "The formalising of these continental partnerships could lead to the integration of past lessons and enable the local industry to position itself to move forward."

Twinning initiatives

Challenging the traditional approach of north-south partnerships, WAN-IFRA's Southern African Executive Twinning Programme brings together newspapers from similar markets to share experiences, aided by an advisory "Brain Trust" of experts from elsewhere.

"There is a great deal African media houses - operating in the same environment - can learn from one another," said Kahiya. "Ultimately, you can grow a lot faster, together."

The Brain Trust, which is made up of senior executives from the Star Group, publisher of the *Toronto Star*, provides ad-hoc counsel to participating newspapers on their business strategy and operations. The members of this voluntary committee were engaged for their specific areas of expertise.

"The knowledge transfer works both ways", said Collins. "We believe we can learn a lot from African media houses, particularly in mobile technologies, because African countries will make a huge leap between print and mobile and will be leaders in these markets".

WAN-IFRA's executive twinning initiatives are part of a strategic partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to advance media development and press freedom worldwide.

For more, go to www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/media-development and www.africanmediainitiative.org.

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