

MDDA's first Media Literacy and Culture of Reading Summit debuts in the Eastern Cape

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The Media Development and Diversity Agency's (MDDA) first Media Literacy and Culture of Reading Summit, a programme intended to promote media awareness, media literacy and the culture of reading amongst learners, was launched at the council chambers of the Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape, on the 28th and 29th March 2009.

Advocate Andre Gaum, Deputy Minister of Education, MP, and the keynote speaker at the two-day summit set the tone of the proceedings with these words:

“The pervasive nature of mass media in our everyday lives necessitates the development of skills that will allow recipients of information to actively engage meanings and messages so as to become discerning viewers and even readers and listeners.”

Adv. Gaum further commended the MDDA for promoting media literacy and culture of reading, as he pointed out that children should be made aware that they live in a world of images, sounds and words, and need to be educated to become critical and informed users of the media. He rounded off by encouraging learners to take an active part in all educational programmes that come their way.



Learners from schools of Umzimvubu and Matatiele Municipalities at the Alfred Nzo District Municipality Council Chambers, attending the Media Literacy and Culture of Reading Summit.

Mr. Mtimde, Chief Executive Officer of the MDDA, explained in his welcome address that: “The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) has a mandate to create an enabling environment for media development and diversity that is conducive to public discourse and that which reflects the needs and aspirations of all South Africans. The deficiency of a culture of reading is a major concern in South African society and indeed in the Southern African region. Media education is part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy.”

The 10 schools that were selected to participate in this summit were five from the Umzimvubu and five from Matatiele

Municipalities. Alfred Nzo District is an area that was earmarked for the first summit because it is predominantly rural with very low levels of literacy amongst learners and language diversity. The group of 50 learners and 10 teachers who participated in the summit stepped up to the challenge and the facilitators were most impressed with the efforts of the group throughout the two days training. The students came up with topics that were of key interest in their localities.

A range of issues were also raised for discussion by the students, teachers and the facilitators, such as; student pregnancies, drugs in schools, teachers coming to school drunk, teachers having sexual relationships with learners and more.

“At the end of the day, the quality of the learners' work showed that they had nonetheless still grasped the main messages and points we'd tried to convey. A big bonus was the strong presence and support of the Alfred Nzo community radio station throughout the workshop. Driving home at the end of the first day, it was uplifting to hear the children live on air, talking excitedly and enthusiastically about everything they'd just learnt,” commented Ms Lisa Blakeway one of the facilitators from of NIE (Newspapers in Education).

The Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Councillor Gcinikhaya Mpumza outlined the poor literacy levels in the district. The Speaker, Councillor Patience Goya expressed excitement at the opportunity presented to the Alfred Nzo District community. Councillor Mnu kwa, who represented Ms Bulelwa Mabhengu, Mayor of Umzimvubu Municipality, commented that MDDA was taking a bold stance in fighting the good fight for literacy, seeing that literacy levels are very low, especially in Eastern Cape.

“Promoting the right of freedom of expression and press and creating an enabling environment for youngsters to be actively involved in media, can only take this region forward in social development. This municipality pledge their full support to MDDA's programme and welcome it. We are very much in support of growing a culture of reading and producing of media.” Cllr Mnu kwa also pointed out that the infrastructural shortcomings the schools are facing in the province, such as; access to information (most rural schools no faxes, computers, telephones etc), lack of books, transport, lack of telecommunication infrastructure, lack of television broadcasting and radio broadcasting services in some areas, etc, are all limiting factors that contribute to the low levels of education and literacy. He urged MDDA to pursue a sound working relationship with the education department and to see to it that this programme should be formally included in the educational curriculum. He also encouraged local newspapers to come on board and physically support the schools in terms of advertising etc. Businesses and community media houses in the area should adopt a school and provide guidance and support to schools, maybe even produce a newsletter or newspapers aimed at learners in schools around the area.

Press Ombudsman, Mr. Joe Thlooe talked to the learners about their right to freedom of expression, what they understood by it and the responsibility that goes with it. This made it a very interactive session, with the learners being able to give their views. He also emphasized the fact that news must always be Truthful, Accurate, Fair and within the correct context. The Press Ombudsman also assured the learners that:

“The media was designed to service societies with information. It must keep communities up to date, but at the same time should also be accessible to communities it serves and act as a platform for them to voice their comments and have their grievances, if any, heard.”

In closing, Ms Nomonde Gongxeka, MDDA Board member, thanked The MDDA and its partners (Alfred Nzo District Municipality, DoE, DPLG, GCIS, Alfred Nzo Community Radio, IAJ, Highway Africa, NIE, ECCF, etc.) as well as the learners, for the successful launch of the first Media Literacy and Culture of Reading Summit.

At the end, Mtimde noted that the Press Ombudsman comments that “this was a successful programme and he really appreciated the opportunity.” The programme was further well covered by the local media (in particular Alfred

Nzo Community Radio and national media (in particular Umhlobo Wenene, Bizcommunity). Learners and teachers were interviewed on radio. The feedback is indeed positive. Ours task is to take this enthusiasm further, work towards: -

- ~ Distributing (in partnership with DoE) newspapers (in particular the local newspapers, in at least these schools***
- ~ Further promoting this media awareness***
- ~ Mobilising support for a possible production of a school newspaper by these schools***
- ~ Ensuring that these schools participate in the DPLG competition.”***

Mtimde added that the MDDA will discuss further with the DoE as we evaluate this summit, see how some immediate actions can be taken forward, like the distribution of local newspapers (community and small commercial newspapers) with possible subsidy on subscription, to empower learners and the schools with the power of information, knowledge and media. The owner of the local newspaper, The Informer, Mr Andile Nomabhunga, offered to distribute his newspapers at the participating schools.

The learners layed out and designed a front page of a newspaper as the outcome of the training conducted by the Institute of the Advancement of Journalism and NIE. Learners from a Matatiele school won the best designed and laid-out page.



Mr. Mtimde, Chief Executive Officer of the MDDA with the winning school from Matatiele.



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