

Common currencies - a necessity for affordable media research in Africa

 By [Walter Wafula](#)

23 Aug 2012

Limited or no access to credible media and audience research in Africa remains one of the key challenges that many media firms and marketers face despite the number of solutions at hand. Jennifer Daniel, the president Pan African Media Research Organisation (PAMRO) discusses possible solutions ahead of The 14th Meeting of [PAMRO](#) and All Africa Media Research Conference in Kampala, Uganda from 26-29 August 2012.



Jennifer Daniel

■ ***Why should media organisations in Africa invest in media and audience research?***

Jennifer Daniel: There are many reasons why such investments are of importance to both media and marketing. At PAMRO we are very focused on one important aspect of media audience research, namely the provision of currencies for the buying and selling of media space and time.

No industry can ever function effectively and efficiently without trusted and accepted currencies which can be used by both marketers and media and which provides them a common currency for trading purposes. An orderly trading environment provides trust in the value of media space and time and when all players in an industry use the same currencies, this encourages growth in advertising spent.

■ ***Some media houses in Africa are reluctant to invest in media research because they find the cost of research very expensive. What can be done to bring the cost of research down?***

Daniel: Let me firstly say that there are very good reasons why media audience research is expensive. However, without industry agreed currencies one will never have the advantages that I have just mentioned. Organisations and industries that are reluctant to spend money on this very basic aspect will find that in the end, they have done damage to their own businesses.

One of the biggest drivers of the cost of media audience research is the need for very large samples. If we can find ways and means to reach large numbers of respondents at a smaller cost, that will be enormously beneficial to all players in the field.

However, although this sounds easy, it is a complex problem that does not have a simple solution.

A lot of hope is currently being placed on the use of digital measurement in future and there are promising signs that new methodologies could bring relieve as far as cost pressures are concerned. The best way to do currency research in Africa is for the most part, still to do face-to face interviews. Digital methodologies have or will take over in certain terrains such as the daily delivery of ratings for television which works well except that it is still very costly.

■ ***Uganda is among the few countries where audience and media research is done, however the outcome of the research is usually contested by some media houses. What can be done to improve the credibility of media research in Africa?***

Daniel: The basic building blocks for doing trusted and accepted currency research is to organise the local industry.

What is needed is associations for the different media such as an organisation that can represent the print industry, one for broadcasters, etc. Then, a marketing association that can represent the marketers as well as associations for the advertising agencies.

Once these building blocks are in place, the industry associations can create a joint industry committee where everyone can be represented and where the currency research can jointly be conducted and controlled by the industry. This leads to a feeling amongst everyone that they are included in the debates around the joint research and that they have a say in the how and what of what is required by the industry as a whole.

This leads to buy in by everyone, whether you are a media owner trying to sell space or time, or an advertising agency or marketer trying to buy space or time for an advertising campaign.

■ ***If business remains as usual, what danger does Africa's media industry face?***

Daniel: For media owners the absence of a common currency means that there is no level playing field. We all know that there are unscrupulous media owners that will lie about their audience numbers. This is bad for those that are honest. For marketers and advertisers the absence of a common currency means that they find it hard to compare numbers supplied by different media owners and in general leads to distrust in the value of the media on offer and less investment (or the incorrect investment) of their advertising spend.

■ ***What would that mean for ordinary media consumers - like readers and viewers?***

Daniel: For consumers it could mean that certain media that deserved to survive may go under. It may also mean that the programmes and editorial that media owners provide to them may not be what they wanted.

■ ***What is the theme of this year's conference and why was it selected?***

Daniel: This year the theme is "From Local to Global: Media Research in a Developing World" and was chosen to illustrate that we in Africa are part of the global community and can lean on international knowhow when needed. Conversely, the conference will also demonstrate how it is sometimes necessary to develop local solutions for local circumstances.

■ ***What are some of the burning issues that this conference will address?***

Daniel: The burning issue in Africa today is; how to take media audience measurement to the next level. The increasing complexity of media, the enormous fragmentation of the media market combined with new types of media and convergence have brought us to a point where serious decisions will have to be made to ensure that sufficient research of the right

quality is conducted to grow the advertising cake.

■ ***What are some of the achievements that have been registered since the last PAMRO meeting and conference?***

Daniel: The PAMRO work group have revived the PAMRO Living Standard Measure (LSM) project and have been collecting data from various African countries in order to fast track the establishment of these LSM groups for African that will be free of charge to all PAMRO members.

The recommended PAMRO Media Research Questionnaire has been revised and will be up on the website for all members to use as a guideline for media research in all countries. This media research questionnaire forms the basis of any media research project and can be modified and customised to the members needs. The quarterly presentations for PAMRAO members have gone ahead successfully. This initiative was started in order to provide networking opportunities for members outside of the yearly conference.

For more, go to www.pamro.org.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

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