

## SANEF needs new blood

You know that a nation is in trouble when those that are supposed to keep our consciousness in check are the ones under scrutiny. You know that a nation is in trouble when those that should be gathering news, become headline newsmakers themselves.



By [Benedicta Dube](#) 11 Dec 2003

Never has the "fourth estate" come under such intense inspection since 1994. We are at an awkward period where, for a change, we cannot look externally for answers. For once the "fourth estate" has had to look within.

Who would forget the disgraceful "Bisto-Gravy" saga? Who would even attempt to apply amnesia to the pathetic indiscretions of the first black editor of *Elle Magazine* in South Africa? Indeed, who would want to ignore the perturbing performance of *City Press* Editor Vusi Mona at the Hefer Commission?

Like the rest of South Africa's society, the media is certainly maturing. Gone are the days when there was a silent treaty amongst practitioners to expose politicians and business peoples' indiscretions, while at the same time, turning a blind eye on our own. Ten years ago, it would have been unheard of to write a front page editorial effectively disowning your own. The shameful dealings of journalists this year would have made for scintillating gossip amongst peers at bars and newsrooms. Never headline news.

Perhaps that's where some of us got the false impression that we could steal other people's work (a crime by the way, that should be punishable by death!) or commit the cardinal sin of betraying the trust of those who give us their time to ensure that we remain informed and therefore able to carry out our duties with confidence. Perhaps this leniency towards each other led some of us to believe that it's OK to surreptitiously help politicians spruce up their images, just for a small fee. Hey, after-all, the trend had developed, where one moment a journalist is reporting on a particular politician, but before you can even blink, that very journalist is the official spokesman of that politician. At some point they get tired and return to their trade, where they are welcomed back with warm hands and a few drinks by fellow colleagues.

If we are to debate the issue of integrity in journalism, then we have to honestly and openly talk about these moral quandaries. One is certainly entitled to swap careers, but where do we draw the line?

Journalists are human beings, and hold no moral authority over the nation. That we can boldly write about our colleagues' misdemeanors suggests that we have grown. Now more than ever it is a time of self-reflection. Why, we have to ask, have organisations like the South African Union of Journalists - SAUJ - failed to become relevant? Why have bodies like the Forum for Black Journalists - FBJ - been unable to steer the course of transformation within the industry? The change that's happened so far has all been by chance, which would probably explain why we have quasi-journalists-cum-spin doctors within our midst. Vusi Mona was not alone, his only crime was that he was clumsy and got caught!

How many of us carry around a copy of our code of ethics in our handbags, that very vital reference document that should guide us when we face moral dilemmas in the execution of our duties? It is time that SANEF reclaims its relevance. Theirs is not only to churn out press releases condemning President Robert Mugabe for failing to respect the fundamental principle of press freedom. Theirs is not to be acting as a quasi labour union, interfering in simple labour disputes between employer and employee. Theirs is to give

journalists direction and guidance. They are, after all, the Editors Forum. They run newsrooms, they guide reporters, they influence editorial direction and they are mentors. They, individually and collectively, shape journalism.

Until SANEF can find itself and its own relevance, we should excuse the meteoric rise of the Vusi Monas c this world. We should also find it within us to pardon him for, in spite of being an Editor himself, making unintelligent utterances such as "there's no organised body that accredits journalists in this country". I suppose an apology is on the way for that "reckless" statement!

It is a terrible indictment on those who are supposed to be giving direction to young entry level journalists who, unlike Mona, were accredited as journalists by going through Journalism Schools. Perhaps SANEF needs new blood at its helm. Those with the drive, energy and fresh ideas! Mondli Makhaya has done a gr job with the *Mail & Guardian*; John Dlodlu has managed to restore some credibility at *The Sowetan* and Justice Malala successfully launched *This Day*. Perhaps, these are the people who should be devoting some of their time in leadership roles at SANEF. We don't have much time. Unless we act now, all of us w soon find ourselves irrelevant. At that point the nation will seriously be in trouble.

## ABOUT BENEDICTA DUBE

Benedicta is MD of HQMedia, a strategic media and communications firm based in Johannesburg. She is a journalist, writer and editor by training and profession. Her experience in the media spans nearly 18 years, 10 of which were served in senior management positions, both in print/publishing and broadcasting. Email her at [dube.benedicta60@gmail.com](mailto:dube.benedicta60@gmail.com), or follow on Twitter at [@BenedictaDube](https://twitter.com/BenedictaDube).  
View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>