

# Suffer the children: media 'guilty of child negligence'

In a society that has forsaken its children, 'not doing enough' to eradicate scourges such as HIV/Aids, poverty, illiteracy, child abuse, prostitution, infant mortality and drug abuse that threaten the lives of the little ones, the onus lies on the media - as community watchdog - to show them some love. But, despite the Media Monitoring Africa's latest report showing an increase in children reporting, their voices are still missing in the newspapers.

## Crystal clear

This became crystal clear yesterday, Thursday, 26 August 2010, when the report showed that only five out of South Africa's 13 mainstream newspapers performed well in terms of coverage of children and their issues.

*Sowetan* tops the list, followed by *Daily Sun*, *Saturday Star*, *The Times* and *The Star*, according to the MMA's ratings, which took account of diversity, rights respected, issues covered, voices heard and ethics.

*City Press*, *The Citizen*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Sun*, *Sunday World*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Business Day* and *The Sunday Independent* were all found 'guilty of child negligence' by the MMA, which described as troubling the fall of features and analysis pieces dealing with children since its last report.

## Dwindling

Despite the report showing that coverage of children has increased from 6.5% in 2003 to 11.4 % in 2010, the MMA regrets that the amount of children's voices being heard in the newspapers is dwindling, falling from 21% to 14%.

William Bird, MMA executive director, said: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, not only adults but also the children. Therefore, it is imperative that we include more children's voices in our reporting."

Bird lambasted *Business Day* for being only interested in the company's financial statements and companies' news and ignoring children's coverage, stating that a society that forsakes its children does so at its own peril.

## Lauded journalists

He also lauded journalists who went an extra-mile to cover children's issues, the efforts of which have culminated to what he called a huge shift in reporting on children in SA.

"Journalists have taken a lot of hammering lately, which is really unjustified. Many journalists care about their jobs not because of the money but because they care about society," he pointed out.

Despite boasting the continent's strongest economy, SA is still very much one of the world's most unequal societies, with child poverty now reaching 65.5% (11 million children) compared to 45.5% of adult poverty, according to the United Nations Development Programme.

## Issues affecting children

An estimated 39% of the SA population are children, and issues affecting these children include inadequate learning conditions and illiteracy (60% of primary schools do not have libraries), hunger, child abuse and sexual assault, prostitution and human trafficking.

Bird said: "Reporting on children is fulfilling and inherently positive. It is vital that we talk about their issues for the sake of our society's sustainability and stability. If you want to eradicate crime and poverty, unless you start by the children, you are wasting your time."

The report said journalists should be encouraged to generate stories about children - rather than relying on traditional shocking or otherwise 'newsworthy' events to happen before covering children's issues.

"Whenever possible, stories about children should be accompanied by additional information that might educate and empower readers and children in particular," the report added.

For more info and details, as well as a [download](#) of the report, go to [www.mediamonitoringafrica.org](http://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org).

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