

Africast, a conference like no other  
By Okoh Aihe, Asst Editor, Communications  
Posted to the Web: Wednesday, November 08, 2006

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/articles/2002/features/technology/tec308112006.html>

From the 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph

What experts said about broadcasting in Africa Keynote speaker, venerated African historian, Prof Ali Mazrui observed that the western world has always tried to interpret information and news from the western perspective, pointing out that the age of the internet will only reinforce that ugly development and perpetually subject Africans to the western viewpoint.

According to Mazrui, "Between the West and the rest, images are distorted by a number of biases which have become imbedded in the mass media and Western-style educational institutions worldwide. These biases include race (a White tragedy is more newsworthy than a Black one); gender (what men do is more newsworthy than what women do); city (urban news get more attention than rural); exortica (witchcraft stories are more fascinating than news about modern medicine in Africa); negativism (bad news gets more extensive news coverage than good news); elitism (power and wealth attract publicity).

In the paper titled: Messages and Images between the West and the Rest: The Media, the Academy and the Internet, Mazrui remarked that in all of these areas Africans countries are disadvantaged because of a western media that informs the west about the rest of the world. "The west continues to be the great go-between between its own knowledge and the knowledge of others, but it has also been the great go-between between other societies as well. Unfortunately the west is a flawed go-between - messenger with its own agenda, subject to its own biases," he said.

Specifically closing in on the internet and brain drain, Mazrui hit on the ugly reality that as more and more Africans become highly skilled in computer technology and usage, some of them will migrate to developed states.

"As matters now stand," he pursued, "the cost of this kind of brain drain are for the time being weightier than the benefits for the African countries. What should constantly be borne in mind is that the intellectual penetration of the south by the northern industrial states must one day be balanced with reverse intellectual penetration by the south to the think tanks of the north. Given the reality of increasingly interdependent world, decolonization will never be complete unless penetration is reciprocal and more balanced. Part of the cost may well be the loss to Africa of highly skilled African computer experts."

Speaking on Broadcasting, Agenda-Setting and the Integrity Question, Mr. Patrick Wilmot has this to say: "Integrity in agenda setting in broadcasting means a clear set of purposes and processes based on transmitting the greatest amount of information for the greatest number of the people. Broadcasters must see their mission as a vocation integral

to the development of the physical and spiritual endowments of their nations and peoples. Their commitment to the truth is not determined only by their ethical and religious beliefs but by the rights of citizens to participate in their nations' development.

Continuing, he said: "Since integrity is fundamental to the discovery and use of the medium, it must be intrinsic to setting agendas for the enlightenment of peoples. Governments should respect those who act as bridges between them and citizens who brought them to power, and not misuse or punish reporters for egotistic or mercenary ends. When leaders accuse broadcasters of 'inciting' the people for telling the truth it shows that they are not worthy to lead. When they arrest reporters for 'sedition' for revealing information it shows they do not belong to the twenty first century. And when they kill reporters for doing their job they show they do not belong to the human race.

When absolute monarchy prevailed, government was a secret society and the truth could be defined as lese majeste, an offence to the person of the monarch. But modern African leaders cannot use this excuse when they kill or deport their critics. Democrats have fought and died over millennia to create genuine democracy where the citizen has a right to be told the truth about the affairs of his or her nation. Modern democracies cannot function when the truth is concealed or distorted, preventing the citizen from having an objective view of government action, and from exercising the fundamental right of calling his or her rulers to account."

While submitting that broadcasters must maintain integrity at all times in the way they practice the profession, Prof. Gerard Igyor counselled that broadcast operators, including governments should create those conditions, adequate remunerations not excluded, to enable broadcasters and broadcast journalists play their role in the society.

The communiqué in brief Putting the conference submissions in perspective, the conferees in a communiqué remarked among others that: Africa's image requires re-branding. Therefore, African broadcasters should be in forefront of the campaign to improve Africa's image.

They should report not just accurately and objectively, but also with a good dose of patriotism and responsibility; if broadcasting is to effectively set the agenda for good governance, improved image and economic development in Africa, its practitioners must operate from the position of truth, morality, integrity and independence; and there is need for urgent transition from analogue to digital broadcasting in Africa.

This will save the continent from becoming a dumping ground for all sorts of discarded obsolete broadcast equipment from other parts of the world. Apart from the ADC crash the conference also suffered from recent changes in the leadership of the NBC and FRCN. The degree of success recorded this year happened because the acting DG of the NBC has been there from the beginning, and had a willing team that was ready to support him to save the commission from an avoidable disgrace.

However, Africast needs reinvention because should it suffer calamity because of government's inconsistent policy, it might be difficult to find another international opening in broadcast calendar of events.