

# LIZWI LOLWAZI

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## SPI's graduates take centre stage in shaping African media

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# SPI's graduates take centre stage in shaping African media



*Du Toit: Our biggest achievement has been developing the PDMM into a responsive programme.*  
Pic: Tatenda Chatikobo

Peter du Toit (PdT), the Deputy Director for the Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI) for Media Leadership, has been with the institute since its founding in 2002. He shares some insights on the SPI's development and where it is going with Katharine Holmes (KH).

#### (KH) What inspired the development of the SPI in 2002?

**PdT:** The Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI) for Media Leadership was the brain child of Professor Guy Berger, the former head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. At that time the Department was getting frequent requests from organizations supporting media development in Africa to provide management training for journalists, and the Department was responding to these requests on an ad hoc basis. The idea of setting up a management training institute was hatched and Prof Berger was able to secure funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. This funding made it possible for the Department to launch an institute with a grant that covered the costs of maintaining a small core staff, including a director, a deputy director, an administrator and a fulltime researcher. The SPI was officially launched in late 2002 with the appointment of its first director, Govan Reddy. Its activities included taking over the NSJ courses – these continued for about five or six years after the Institute was launched – and developing new offerings. The Institute was also positioned to conduct research into questions confronting managers in the region. Prior to the launch of the SPI, the Department had also been granted permission to launch a new Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) and the task of developing and teaching this course became the SPI's flagship activity. I joined the SPI about six months after its launch and was responsible for developing the initial Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) and

running several of our short courses.

#### KH: What are the SPI's major achievements from 2002 up until now?

**PdT:** Without doubt, I think our biggest achievement has been developing the PDMM into a very strong programme that is responsive to the dramatic changes that are happening in the media industry. I'm also especially proud of the successes that have been achieved by our graduates, many of whom have risen to influential positions as journalists, managers and entrepreneurs in the media industry. I also think that we have been able to develop a very strong basket of short courses targeting managers and editors from the print, broadcast and online sectors which attract top level participants from South Africa and across the continent. The course we offer to Government media leaders is also very strong. The Institute's research arm has also produced a number of exceptionally useful reports and papers that inform our teaching and which have benefited people in the media industry. Perhaps our biggest achievement is the fact that we are still able to offer services to the media industry in the region. We are operating in a challenging environment and keeping an institute like ours going has taken real dedication from our small core staff.

#### KH: What are the biggest challenges that the SPI has faced since its inception?

**PdT:** Our biggest challenge has to do with the fact that we are operating in turbulent times when many media organizations are struggling financially. It's unfortunate that companies will often be reluctant to spend money on training their staff when times are tough and this has a knock-on effect on us. Another of our challenges has been the ongoing struggle to find scholarships for our students. We would love to attract more students

from across the continent, but many simply cannot afford to spend a year in South Africa completing the PDMM, although we receive constant requests from people who would like to do so. From a staff point of view, the SPI has always been lean and mean. We have a small staff and everyone has a multitude of different responsibilities. This has been good in terms making the organization sustainable, but it can be difficult to make time to develop new opportunities.

#### KH: What contribution does the SPI make to the African media market?

**PdT:** To my knowledge, we are the only organization in Africa exclusively dedicated to educating and training media managers. We have seen close to 200 people graduate from our PDMM programme and well over 2,000 people will have completed our short courses by the end of this year. All of these have taken valuable knowledge and skills into the media industry and many have drawn on these lessons to ensure their organizations become sustainable and profitable. We have also been able to make some very valuable partnerships over the years which have enabled us to make an impact. For instance, through our partnership with the Open Society for Southern Africa we have seen more than 20 women from Southern African media organizations complete the PDMM programme. Our recent work with the International Research & Exchanges Board in Mozambique has also enabled us to train more than 80 media managers in that country.

#### KH: Where are the opportunities for the SPI to grow?

**PdT:** From a growth point of view, the SPI will be exploring different ways of reaching managers and editors who need support in

## Editorial Comment

### 12 years and counting

The Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI) for Media Leadership at Rhodes University has for the past decade churned out media managers through its Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) graduates, the majority of whom have gone on to take up influential media leadership positions at top media companies and corporations across Africa and beyond.

Tales are told of one who made it to Facebook in London and others who were brave enough to take the plunge and start their own media company offerings. They have not only survived but thrived. Yet others have used the PDMM as a stepping stone to further their academic careers through some of the world's most sought after scholarships like Britain's Chevening.

That is not all that one gets from the SPI menu. On the platter are also short courses run throughout the year tailored variously at print, broadcast and online journalism managers and other courses for those who aspire to be media leaders.

A myriad other media people have passed through the SPI's corridors just to refresh, stay abreast and ahead of the pack with up-to-date knowledge, understandings and work competencies that are key to success in media management and technology.

In this special issue, we look back at 12 years of the SPI – 10 of these years focusing on the PDMM -- mostly from a celebratory perspective while being cognisant of the challenges that still face not just the SPI but the African media industry in general.

We hear some more (as previous issues of this newsletter have already showcased) of the successes of the SPI's alumni and glean from the current crop what their hopes and expectations are.

Critically, we take a closer look at what lies ahead for the SPI and why you, as a practising media manager or an aspiring one, should join the ranks of those of us who have drunk from this fountain that quenches your appetite for everything media management and beyond!

Editor,

Chisomo Ngulube

running their organizations. There are tremendous opportunities out there for us to provide distance learning and to make use of interactive technologies to run courses with media leaders in different parts of Africa. There is enormous demand for this kind of training. At the same time, I'd loathe to see us lose the value that comes from having people coming together in the same room to thrash out their problems. We will need to find a balance here. The SPI also needs to be providing relevant training to people that equips them to deal with rapid change. This does not just mean helping organizations to find workable business models in response to the online environment, it also means helping people to deal with the way these environments have changed work places. Tomorrow's leaders will require a very different skills set. We need to be conducting research into the ways in which media managers are responding to these challenges and to draw on this research to develop programmes that enable managers to respond to these changes.

#### KH: Where is the SPI going in the future?

**PdT:** I think we will want to continue to grow our PDMM class, offer a wider range of innovative short courses and to continue conducting relevant research that informs both the industry and our teaching. We are exploring the possibility of offering a more advanced qualification in media management, possibly offering a course at a master's level. This is an idea that still needs a lot of work.

# How the PDMM, OSISA scholarship impacted my life

## A reflective piece

by PDMM graduate Takondwa Jumbe (TJ) of Malawi

**W**hen I applied for the OSISA (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa) Scholarship to join the PDMM (Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management) Programme at Rhodes University in South Africa, I was working as a humble programme producer driven by a desire to experience the world, learn new things and, of course, take a break from the daily grind for a few months at the same time.

Fortunately, I was successful and I found myself on the Rhodes Campus in February of 2006 – six years after my first degree -- feeling a bit rusty in terms of class work but with high hopes and expectations.

For me, the PDMM was a wonderful experience. During this time, I rediscovered some things about myself such as the fact that I'm actually a nerd who loves to learn (Shh, don't tell anyone or I lose my street cred!). I also found out that although I am mostly an introvert, I loved the practical classes where we had to develop ideas and present them to the class for critical input and debate. These activities taught me to develop and present my ideas and also to accept both positive and negative criticisms gracefully. We all know that (SPI director) Francis (Mdlongwa) is not at all shy to dispense his criticism, with that laugh of his! That said, the PDMM programme sharpened my leadership skills through helping me to build up my confidence and other abilities as a media manager.

It wasn't all work though and during my time with the SPI, I made some lifelong friendships

with some of my classmates. I can confidently say that I have a sister in Lesotho, another in Swaziland and a brother in Kenya. Not forgetting the home away from home that I consider the SPI to be to me.

It is during this time that TJ, as a brand, was born as that is what my Francis, Pete (Du Toit, SPI deputy director), classmates and friends would call me to get around pronouncing my name, Takondwa. To this day, TJ has stuck and I'm pretty sure that there are some people I work with today who have no idea what my actual name is!

When I returned home after completing my PDMM, my career took off. I was promoted to Regional Manager for Television Malawi within six months of my return. A year later I studied for my master's degree in leadership and change management and I will honestly say that the PDMM course built a strong foundation for this.

Today I work as the Controller of Business Affairs at Malawi Broadcasting Corporation and I am responsible for marketing and brand management for both television and radio services. The job can be exhausting but it has its moments. When you see the results of your work and that of your team, you smile to yourself and think: yes, I did that. That makes all the exhaustion worth it. So for me, hard work is not an option; it's necessary for success.

For me, the PDMM --through Francis and Pete-- is that critical first step that has enabled me to get this far and I will forever be grateful to OSISA for the scholarship opportunity.



TJ: My career took off after the PDMM. Pic: Courtesy of TJ.



## Editorial Team



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# Class of 2014 hails media management course suggests more practical approach



*Qukula: My inexperience will overshadow my insights.*



*Powering the point: Chatikobo makes a presentation. Pic: Sithandwa Ngwetsheni*

By Baboki Kayawe

**W**ith just a month to complete their Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM), the class of 2014 has commended the programme's rich theoretical approach to media management. Judging by the class's enthusiasm, a couple of media moguls and top-notch managers are set to emerge if all the learning does not remain within the walls of the Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI) for Media Leadership upon the course's completion.

A common thread that links the lessons which PDMM participants have garnered so far is the broad look into the managerial aspects of media enterprises.

Tatenda Chatikobo, a Zimbabwean, is an enterprising young man who envisages running his media firm. This course has been an eye opener for him because it equipped him with the essentials of managing media business operations.

"I have come to understand that media involves a lot of interrelated processes that function together to create content, and at the heart of all this is where media management comes in to ensure effectiveness and efficiency which ultimately lead to profitability and sustainability," he said.

A middle management journalist from Malawi, Chisomo Ngulube, takes home "relevant, timely and enormous lessons" which she says will be handy for her success as a manager.

She summed up her lessons thus: "Key and critical to the work that I do is the need for sound policy in managing a media company, how best to tap into emerging online and digital media while handling convergence."

South African Sithandwa Ngwetsheni says the greatest lesson she picked from the PDMM is the importance of self-branding and differentiating herself from the rest as a media leader.

"For the past few months, I have learnt that it is important to find your speciality and that's

something I am working on. I don't want to be like the rest," she said.

For Zambian television journalist Inutu Himanje, the PDMM is like a mini-MBA. Himanje has long harboured the ambition of establishing a radio station that caters for the female market but which also includes men. She also wants to launch a celebrity magazine that targets the youth.

"In that way, I hope to be part of the growth of the media landscape in Zambia," she says. Himanje is Head of the state-run Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation's Television 2.

All is not rosy though. The question on the lips of many, particularly students who just transitioned from their undergraduate studies into the course, is: "Where do I go from here?"

"My worst fears are that none of what I have learnt will even apply or be relevant and that my inexperience will overshadow my insights," lamented a 2014 graduate of the University of Cape Town, Qama Qukula.

Another South African student, Katherine Holmes, whose interest lies in TV production, is afraid of not having enough practical experience to complement her theoretical knowledge.

"I know I'm going to have to start from the bottom and work my way up," she says.

Nonetheless, Holmes is ready to face life post-PDMM. Not as an employee though because she has plans to bag in a master's degree before committing to a career.

As for Neo Koza, who has worked for Rhodes Music Radio for a while, youth media is an area of interest. Like Qukula, Ngwetsheni and Holmes, she worries about the industry welcoming her with a job. Her greatest concern is being hired by an organization whose systems are not designed around proper human resources management processes.

"It will probably be the most disabling and most regressive environment to be in," she feared.

Chatikobo reiterated his colleague's fears

when he said that "the job market is quite tough, with a lot of employers choosing skill and experience over qualification".

Vuyokazi Burwana, a South African, is pessimistic that her lack of media training might stand in her path when seeking media employment opportunities.

"I am not a trained journalist so I'm not really sure what kind of jobs I should be looking for," she said.

The students also saw a need to throw in improvements in the way the course is configured and run. They have unanimously called on the SPI to consider a more practical approach to accommodate their lack of practical experience.

"The PDMM programme lacks fieldwork and visits to organizations," Chatikobo said, though quick to appreciate the compulsory media management observation internship students undertake during their mid-year holidays in June and July.

He thought more fieldwork was necessary to practically acknowledge some of the concepts learnt in class. In agreement with Chatikobo, Qukula opined that "digital technology could be used more strategically beyond power point presentations".

"The modules could have been structured better; I would have liked to have a more comprehensive understanding of media marketing, advertising and audiences before grappling with the larger context of economics and finances," Koza said.

Burwana, who is finding it difficult to explore the market for opportunities because she simply does not know where to start, suggested tours to media organizations to supplement practical experience and to network with these firms.

"Interacting with media managers, field trips to media companies and practical lessons are needed to add value to the PDMM programme," she said.

SPI Director Francis Mdlongwa commented: "It is always a challenge to find the right balance of adequately covering theory and practical elements in a course such as the PDMM, and doing all this in one year. It becomes even more challenging when you have a mix of students, with some fresh from university and others who already have work experience."

"We hear the students' concerns to have what is known as work integrated learning to improve their employability, which is emerging as a big issue among employers across the world. We try to do this by immersing students into a real-world work environment during the mid-year holidays when students spend a month on a media company of their choice observing and interrogating authentic management at these firms."

"Going forward, we will look into the possibility of doing more of the things which some of the students are suggesting, including having to provide them with structured career guidance and counselling sessions."

The Class of 2014 is a unique combination of on-the-job media practitioners and recent graduates with interests in management roles and media entrepreneurship. The PDMM course seems to be what they needed as it is designed to prepare recent graduates and working professionals to fast-track their careers to management positions in the media.

It addresses key issues confronting media managers including questions relating to, among others, the impact of new technologies on traditional media, the critical role of leadership, managing people in changing times, understanding media markets and making creative content decisions. PDMM also introduces students to the fundamentals of media economics, human resource management and distribution strategy. See more details on the PDMM at <http://spi.ru.ac.za/>

# management course, critical approach



We can nail this: Inutu Himanje (R) discusses with classmates. Pic: Tatenda Chatikobo

**Use  
PDMM to  
network:  
says first  
graduant**



Pillay has won numerous awards. Pic: Courtesy of Pillay's twitter account

by Chisomo Ngulube

**M**inoshni Pillay has fond memories of the Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM). She enrolled in 2004, making her and three others pioneers of the programme.

She vividly recalls how the PDMM helped her brush shoulders with people she calls “wonderful industry experts”.

“The world of media is a cut throat and often times harsh place. Newspapers rely on high print runs, radio lives for increasing rams and television thrives on high audience ratings. The PDMM opened my eyes to the cents and rands side of what has become my passion,” reminisces Pillay, who worked for Highway Africa for two years after graduating with the PDMM and later joined SABC Radio in 2009.

Pillay has had a decorated career as a journalist for the SABC. Some of her accolades include the Magqubu Ntombela and Ian Player Awards at the SAB Environmental Journalists of the Year 2012.

She has this to say to currents students and those wishing to join the programme: “Use your year at this memorable institute to make contacts with industry rock stars. By that, I don’t mean the glamour gods that many think journalism is all about, but those who do the hard slog working behind the scenes ... it’s up to you to build relationships to learn and to leave a lasting impression as you enter your chosen field.”

# Beware of the Icarus Paradox, SPI head tells media

**P**DMM student Sheryleen Masuku (SM) spoke to Francis Mdlongwa (FM), Director of the Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI) for Media Leadership, on a range of questions regarding the SPI and other issues to mark the Institute's twelfth anniversary this year. Excerpts from their conversation:

**SM: You worked for the international news and information agency Reuters and other media companies and broke some of the world's big news stories. What was it like during those heady days and what brought you to Rhodes?**

**FM:** I count myself as having been lucky and blessed to have witnessed and reported on some of the important events and issues which, to a large extent, defined Africa and humanity's existence in the 20th century. Working for Reuters in many parts of the world for more than a decade, I found myself thrust into covering events such as Lesotho's military coup in January 1986; the historic multi-party elections in South Africa, Kenya and Malawi in the 1990s; the war and peace in countries of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea and Angola and Zimbabwe; the toppling of then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991; the collapse of the imposing Berlin Wall and the subsequent end of the Cold War.

I had earlier reported on other history-making events such as the end of white minority rule in then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the coming to power of Robert Mugabe and other black nationalists; South Africa's campaign to hold on to white apartheid rule and what neighbouring black-ruled African countries saw as its destabilising efforts on them; the formation of the so-called Frontline States of Southern Africa and their role in the struggle for democracy in the region; the role of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union); and many other events in what I consider to have been a truly epoch-making century as humanity sought a democracy that works and economic and political freedom that brings meaning to their lives. It was both an exciting and yet challenging and tumultuous period often marked by rapidly changing events. Having witnessed all this and realising that one is not getting any younger, I felt that it was time to slow down a bit and not to continue being what a friend of mine used to jokingly call me "a visiting husband" because I was away from home too often and for too long at any given time! So I was again lucky to find myself working at Rhodes University, where I could 'slow down' (in reality it is equally busy at Rhodes) and be with the family more often.

But more seriously, I regarded the Rhodes job as a presenting me with a new and exciting opportunity: that is, educating and training journalists and other media leaders in redressing what over the years I had noticed were some knowledge and skills gaps in the industry. The issue of how media companies are led, managed and staffed; their response to emerging environmental challenges and opportunities and the speed with which they respond; their ability to deal with an increasingly more complex, fluid and uncertain future, are all at the heart of whether these firms succeed or fail. This becomes even more critical now with the collapse of legacy media's traditional business model of 'selling audiences to advertisers' and the emergence of rapid and yet permanent market turbulence.

**SM: Has it been worth your while?**

**FM:** I am not exactly sure of the context of this question. If you mean 'do I feel contented professionally' in my current position, the answer is yes. If you are asking whether I still miss the hectic work of international news reporting, the answer is also yes. The important point though is

that I am using my work experience gleaned from many years' work at several organizations to try to illuminate my teaching at the SPI, essentially integrating work and theory by giving examples of what works and does not work and why, and proffering possible solutions of what could be done in dealing with management and leadership challenges that face media and journalists.

**SM: What have been some of the highlights at the SPI for you?**

**FM:** Working with SPI colleagues and the founder of the Institute, Professor Guy Berger, to lay a firm foundation for the institution, including drawing up its founding vision, mission, values and so on; expanding both the short courses and the number of students who attend the flagship Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) through a focused campaign to mobilize scholarships for these students; and the perennial quest to keep the Institute sustainable in tough market conditions which have seen the media industry cutting back on training budgets, which in turn impacts negatively on the SPI's income.

**SM: The courses the SPI offers are good but would you say they are attracting the right numbers? If not, what are you doing about it?**

**FM:** As I have just indicated in answer to your previous question, some of the media companies in Africa are cutting back on training budgets, which means that we need to be more creative and innovative in designing courses and programmes that are more relevant to the needs of the media industry. Essentially, this means having to do more market research on the courses and programmes that have traction and indeed having to consult the media industry on how best the SPI could serve them without compromising the Institute's independence and mission to run courses and programmes that are based on sound theory and practice. While we have expanded our short courses and more media workers are thus attending them, and we have increased the PDMM intake from four at the PDMM's launch in 2004 to about 14-23 students a year, we could do with more people attending these courses and the PDMM.

**SM: The SPI clocks 12 years of existence this year – 10 years of them offering the PDMM since 2004 -- where do you intend to steer the ship?**

**FM:** The challenges are many and varied, and I have already outlined most of them earlier. But the single biggest challenge for the SPI is to be more proactive and responsive in effectively addressing the education and training needs of a rapidly changing media landscape.

We are seeing a new era in which traditional media companies that have in the past been successful financially are suddenly facing an existential threat of how to remain relevant to survive the fluid and permanently changing market conditions; where technology is redefining these companies' business models which have worked for many centuries; where technology is impacting what news content is and how it is being distributed, to who, by whom and when; where technology is changing the consumption behaviours and patterns of people who were once known as audiences and how to 'monetise' these shifting audiences on a media company's multi-platforms, and so on.

One of the lasting lessons for traditional media and indeed all organisations across the world emanating from the twenty century is that, paradoxically, the more successful an organisation becomes, the greater the danger that it will fail because of complacency and the failure to see, let alone, embrace far-reaching change. This is what in business management is known as the Icarus Paradox. It is taken from a Greek mythical



*Mdlongwa: Quality content is still key.*

*Pic: Tatenda Chatikobo*

character of the same name who, because he had become successful in flying with wings bolted onto him with wax, disregarded his father's advice and flew too close to the sun. His wings melted and he crashed down to his death.

Media companies across the world used to be literally minting money because they operated in an environment of economic scarcity in terms of the limited numbers of these media firms. Now, thrust into an environment of economic abundance where audiences and advertisers have too many media platforms and choices of the digital era, traditional media have been slow to see this change coming, even offering free content on the internet at some stage with no strategic thinking of why they were doing this and how they could make money out of it.

When News Corporation chief Rupert Murdoch started talking about the need for media companies to erect 'pay walls' for their digital content subscribers in early 2000, many in the industry and the academy thought he was crazy. But look at what has happened since then. Many media firms have copied his example at the *Wall Street Journal*, *The London Times* and *Sunday Times*. The most successful 'pay walls' – that is, 'pay walls' that are beginning to bring in substantial revenue when measured against revenue from traditional print advertising – are, however, those at the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times* in London and the *Wall Street Journal*, and not the 'pay walls' of many newspapers across the world. Why? Primarily because the successful media firms have credible content that is trusted, is needed and is wanted by their audiences; they have content which people can use (i.e. the utility of content); and content which adds value in many ways to the lives and work of their audiences. It's not good enough for a media firm to be just on several platforms, including digital; it has to have great and credible content. This is what media companies are

selling – in fact, they are essentially selling their reputation and trust that they have developed with their audiences over time.

**SM: The SPI and its partners have been at the forefront in training women as media managers and leaders. How successful have these efforts been in trying to redress the gender inequality gap that exists in the media industry?**

**FM:** I think we have been successful if you look at the resources in the form of scholarships that we have had. All the past 21 OSISA (Open Initiative for Southern Africa) women scholars, all the five Primedia women scholars and many others who included a mix of women and men sponsored by MTN have successfully graduated with a PDMM. Most of these scholars are now in influential positions in media across Southern Africa and are at the forefront of trying to transform their workplaces to improve staff diversity, they are designing and implementing policies that purposefully entrench gender equality and equity in their work places, and they are leading efforts to mainstream gender into the news content of their media firms.

But these numbers are really a drop in the ocean when you look at the scale and the entrenched nature of the challenge that we are trying to address in the newsrooms of Southern African media. We are therefore in talks with OSISA, Primedia and other potential scholarship-givers to try to increase markedly the number of women PDMM graduates so that these graduates' impact, over time, could be felt in most newsrooms of Southern Africa. Indeed, we appeal to all organisations and individuals who share our vision of gender equality and equity in the media and who believe in the importance of this project to come forward and be counted among those organisations which made a difference to a just and urgent cause.

# Digital divide challenges African media leaders

By Sheryleen Masuku

**J**ournalists and editors from across Africa have highlighted high levels of illiteracy, poverty and expensive broadband as major setbacks to reaching rural and disadvantaged communities using social and online media.

While hailing the positive changes in civic engagement and public debate encouraged by the rise of social media, journalists at this year's Highway Africa conference held at Rhodes University in South Africa expressed concern over the exclusion of Africa's large rural and poor communities from public discourse burgeoning on social media.

Social media has been used by some African activists to highlight social injustices. This was more pronounced in North Africa during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2010, where social media platforms were used to organise protests which later led to the formation of new 'democratic' governments.

Despite these marked benefits, media leaders at the conference said they are still struggling to use the new digital and social media platforms to reach poorer communities.

One of the delegates, Latifah Ngunjiri who heads TV Productions at Royal Media Services in Kenya, said social media has enabled dialogue with urban audiences but to the exclusion of rural masses.

"Access to social media is limited to the urban population. Seventy percent of the population [in Kenya] still do not have access to the internet because of limitations of electricity and other factors," Ngunjiri noted.

Internet access in Africa is largely available in cities where it is mainly used by the elite as costs of home internet data bundles remain out of reach for many. Online media companies target this group of high-end users as they are easier to 'monetise' and they are more appealing to advertisers than their cash-starved rural counterparts.

Which is why Grace Natabaalo, Programme Associate at African Centre for Media Excellence in Uganda, highlighted the need for media companies to research the type of African audiences using social media.

"We have not done any sort of research to show how media houses can benefit from their audiences," she said.

Her views were shared by Wellington Radu, Head of Programmes at Media Monitoring Africa which is based in South Africa, who states that such research should extend to how disadvantaged communities could benefit from using social media.

"Access to information remains an issue and we really need to find out what are some of the ways of seeking information for these disadvantaged groups," Radu said.

Bridging the digital divide

The media leaders highlighted the need to partner with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to narrow the digital divide and increase access to information as a basic human right.

To this, CSOs and activists who took part in the conference emphasized the need for governments to provide services such as electricity to enable companies to connect people to internet services to try to reach poor rural communities.

One such organisation is Bosco, which helps poor communities in northern parts of Uganda access to digital media.

"We provide free internet access in rural areas and we provide it in local languages," said Bosco director Lawrence Okema.

Okema, however, said challenges of accessibility still remain because most of their clients did not have smart phones.

The other option is to take advantage of the growth of mobile phone usage in Africa.

"In Kenya, we are using text messages and WhatsApp more than Facebook and Twitter to reach to our rural audiences," Latifah observed.

In countries such as Zimbabwe, it is reported that "the criminalisation of open public discourses over the past three decades has led to a marked shift towards online discourses pegged through different portals, with participants located in various parts of the world", according to an



Mich Atagana Editor of MemeBurn.com making her contributions at the Highway Africa Conference 2014.

Photo courtesy of Highway Africa

academic paper presented at the 2014 Highway Africa Conference by Brilliant Mhlanga and Mandlenkosi Mpofu.

These public debates mainly on social media have grown to such an extent that a unique application called Storify has been created to help citizen journalists create videos and audio files of events taking place in their communities and even in the rural areas.

The application, which was developed by Free Press Unlimited for the mobile community project in Zimbabwe, can be downloaded on any Android smart phones for free.

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## From PDMM to PhD: The sky is the limit, says Mpofu

By Chisomo Ngulube

**N**kosinothando Mpofu graduated with the PDMM (Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management) in 2007 and has not looked back. She immediately enrolled for a master's degree and then a PhD at the University of Fort Hare.

Mpofu credits the PDMM with setting the tone for the path she was to embark on enroute to acquiring her PhD and in developing her academic writing skills.

"Two courses, media policy and new media technology, in the PDMM programme were of much significance to me. After the programme, I wanted to know more about the new media, in particular social media. As a result, my master's programme focused on the use of social media for health communication

purposes mainly to understand whether they can also be utilised for health and development communication given their undeniable popularity amongst a vast number of users," says the University of Fort Hare lecturer.

For her PhD studies, Mpofu read into on HIV/AIDS communication in South Africa particularly, the success of media in communicating with targeted audiences, describing it as an interesting field of study given the state of the disease in the country.

While some could have been content with a PhD, Mpofu has her eyes set beyond the sky. Next up for her is research and more research in new media, health and development communication.

"I also plan, God willing, to look for an industry-based platform and/or opportunity that

will allow me to make practical contributions in policy formulation, in addition to my current academic-oriented contributions concerning the use of new media in developmental projects, health and development communication," says the 2007 PDMM scholar.

Last words?

"To those currently enrolled, make maximum use of the opportunity. To everyone at Sol Plaatje, may you continue to enrol and empower future media managers and specialists. The future of the African continent and the world at large rests upon the notable contributions of such media programmes," she says.

# Give me a slice of media!

By Neo Koza

The SPI (Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership) is known at Rhodes University largely for its Postgraduate Diploma in Media Management (PDMM) and its annual free pizza lunch that is designed to woo prospective students. Unlike in previous years, the crowd at the 2014 informal pizza lunch, mostly students from humanities and commerce, appeared to have less of an interest in the free food than in what the PDMM offers.

Third year journalism student Saya Jones, for instance, said she hopes to enrol on the PDMM to extend her knowledge of radio broadcasting and would like to be accepted on a Primedia scholarship ([www.ru.ac.za/spi/](http://www.ru.ac.za/spi/)).

"I like the way their (Primedia) media products differ and would really like to be a part of their production management," she said.

Another attendee, Tom Draper, was uncertain of his postgraduate pursuits.

"I don't know yet. But I definitely want to use my Economics and Journalism majors to make money," he told this reporter.

And speaking to the over 30 undergraduate students who attended the lunch, SPI Director Francis Mdlongwa said the course, the only one of its kind in Africa and the developing world, is tailored towards addressing media management challenges in the African and international contexts.

"The aim of the course is to equip students with a holistic understanding and knowledge of how media organizations have to transform themselves to remain relevant and sustainable in the face of rapid and discontinuous technology-led changes," said Mdlongwa who engaged the students in a talk centred on global telecoms company Motorola and why its much-heralded satellite-based mobile phone Iridium failed in 1998.

The most common response from the students was that Motorola's phone project "failed because Motorola could not innovate" and that it did not do adequate research on its customer needs and wants, and on whether the mobile phone itself would work as planned.

Mdlongwa went on to say that case studies of



*Crunch time: Students help themselves to a slice or two of the pizza. Pic: Tatenda Chatikobo.*

media firms such as Motorola were used to teach PDMM students to bring home the underlying causes of successes and failures of media companies at a time of fast-paced market changes.

The PDMM has a strong focus on media companies in broadcasting and print and is open to graduates in any field. Applications are available online at [www.ru.ac.za/spi/](http://www.ru.ac.za/spi/).

Graduates of the PDMM programme have emerged as heads of some of the leading

media institutions in Africa – with one of the graduates running the global content of a leading international social media group in London.

A 2012 alumnus, Harry Davies for instance, runs a successful 'free' newspaper company in Harare, Zimbabwe; one graduate is a senior business manager for Malawi Television; one graduate is heading up Lesotho's information and broadcasting department; another graduate runs a successful media group in Accra, Ghana. Most

of the graduates are in mid-level jobs in content management, communications management, research, etc. across Africa.

Mdlongwa, who has taught these media leaders, insists: "You can't get a better testament of the value, utility and relevance of any course than what the PDMM graduates are themselves demonstrating out there in the real world of work."

## PDMM graduate secures MA scholarship in the UK



Gausi: Rhodes experience prepared me well. Pic: Supplied by Gausi

**C**hikondi Gausi (CG), a 2008 PDMM graduate from Malawi, secured a highly competitive scholarship offered by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) and the Chevening to study Media and International Development at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom. In this interview, she tells Chisomo Ngulube (CN) what she has done since leaving the Sol Plaatje Institute (SPI), her current studies and the future.

**CN: How did the qualification you got from SPI help you in securing the scholarship in the UK?**

CG: When I got an OSISA (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa) Scholarship to study the PDMM, I was still "young" in the industry. I had only worked as a reporter for less than a year so getting the scholarship was a great achievement for me. This gave me confidence both as a professional and a person to pursue other goals in life. I started exploring opportunities for further studies and my experience during the OSISA application process definitely helped me this time around. Last year, I got a CBA-Chevening Scholarship to pursue a Master's Degree in Media and International Development at the University

of East Anglia in the UK. It is a scholarship administered by the CBA (an association of public broadcasters across the globe) and the UK government.

**CN: How is your experience in the UK and did your background from Rhodes make it easier for you to adapt?**

CG: The PDMM course at Rhodes was very comprehensive. The lecturers were very critical and expected certain standards from students. In addition, presentations were encouraged as part of the learning process. Here in the UK, it is pretty much the same thing. Students are also encouraged to take responsibility of their own learning. Of course, the lecturers are always there to give support.

**CN: What do you hope to do with your MA qualification?**

CG: I hope to pursue more development-related stories as opposed to other angles. Doing development studies has helped me to look at the media from a different angle altogether and I am sure this will open windows of opportunities for me in future in mainstream media or otherwise.

**P**DMM 2012 graduate Rebecca Theu has just been named editor of the Nation in Sunday in Malawi. The paper is one of the two major Sunday dailies in that country. See full story <http://mwnation.com/npl-hires-female-editor/>