

# At a tipping point: Community voices create the difference

How mutual journalism innovates the news

International media conference in Berlin, March 18, 2010



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**Frankfurter Allgemeine**  
ZEITUNG FÜR DEUTSCHLAND

**inVent**

Capacity Building International  
Germany

## The International Institute for Journalism (IIJ)

The International Institute for Journalism (IIJ) of InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany, was founded in 1962. It gives journalists and media managers from developing and transitional countries the opportunity to enhance their knowledge in the media business. The IIJ offers advanced training and dialogue programmes that focus on political and conflict sensitive reporting, economics and business journalism, on climate change and environmental reporting as well as on multimedia and online journalism.

The aim of the IIJ programme is to strengthen the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press in partner countries of German development cooperation and to thus improve the conditions for democratisation and economic and social development. In this capacity, the IIJ represents a key pillar in the media development work of the Federal Government of Germany and in particular of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The IIJ currently offers up to 40 training courses and dialogue programmes per year which take place both in Germany and in the partner countries where the IIJ cooperates with regional journalistic training institutions. A high proportion of the IIJ alumni hold senior positions in the media industry throughout the world.

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# Citizen journalists on their way to participation

Editorial by Astrid Kohl

Everyone is talking about citizen journalism. Articles written by bloggers and other citizen journalists, which were not too long ago seen as a subculture to the traditional media landscape, have since joined forces in a fusion of old and new.

The multitude of e-channels has put everybody just a keyboard away from producing content themselves. For people who formerly had no chance of being heard, citizen journalism is a great opportunity for participation. Moreover, the individual cannot only comment on stories, she and he are providing resources and information beyond the scope of the mainstream media. Especially in countries without a free press bloggers, tweeters, photo and video journalists can give underrepresented and underprivileged groups a voice and add to the media diversity. They are beating their ways through censorship and enable cross-border dialogue. As in Iran, as in Zimbabwe or in Kenya during their latest elections, they are making a real difference.

So the big media houses have lost their monopoly on news. Whereas not too long ago citizen journalists were shunned by professional media, now bloggers, amateur journalists – citizen journalists – are not only invited to provide feedback on articles, but also to take part in the research that goes into them. Newspapers and online magazines publish readers' articles and photographs. Amateur videographers receive technical support from television stations that then broadcast their reports. So media houses have taken a U-turn and have opened up their outlets to the public to share information and views.

But what are the underlying risks of citizen journalism? Is information gathered through "street reporting" reliable? Is this in fact a new more participatory form of journalism? And how do people participate who have no access to computers, let alone the internet? To make this mutual journalism a success it is, therefore, essential to promote media literacy in society and to provide guidance to citizen journalists.

The third international media conference hosted by InWEnt's International Institute for Journalism (IJJ) and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) has discussed the different trends in citizen journalism and looked into the potentials of cooperations with the mainstream media.



Astrid Kohl is head of the International Institute for Journalism (IJJ) of InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany. She welcomed the audience to the third international media conference.

# Between facts and opinion: The challenge of citizen journalism

Welcome address by Dr Roland Gerschermann, Managing Director of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany

It is a pleasure to welcome you at the Berlin office of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany's leading daily newspaper. The topic of our today's meeting relates to the media business. In many countries today, newspapers are in crisis. One of the most important reasons for this is that classified advertising – that once used to be the industry's commercial backbone – has gone online in large parts. No economic upturn is going to bring it back.

Media companies live in a fast-changing environment today. Technology is constantly changing, and new players are offering new products and services on the market. News is increasingly being distributed via aggregator sites. But the media organisations that typically generate the original content do not make any money from this form of public attention. Nor do newspapers' own websites bring in enough money at the moment. At the same time, readers are becoming more and more used to taking free information for granted. But journalistic online content which was generated by media companies cannot be delivered free of charge on the internet in the long run.

## Journalism has to serve the public good

Free of charge is the keyword here. "Citizen journalism" is about non-journalists expressing their views and sharing their knowledge online without any financial reward. New communities arise, and online social networks have found their place in modern societies. This development is welcome. It is an expression of the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of speech. More voices in the public arena can add to a more lively democracy. This is why I highly appreciate the contribution of citizens who comment on issues of public concern. Especially in countries without freedom of expression, the world wide web plays a crucial role in informing people.



Citizen journalists can help informing people, especially in countries without a free press. Professional media are, however, still needed to get the whole picture, as Roland Gerschermann is convinced.

But more voices in the public arena do not necessarily add to a more lively democracy. The decisive question is: how do people or companies best serve the common good? If bloggers express their anger or offer their personal views rather than facts striving for the most possible objectivity, then the common good is not well served. The same is true if ideologues mainly promulgate their own convictions and try to prevail over those interested in objective problem solving. This is why readers should always ask the one but essential question: is the text opinion-based or is it fact-based reporting? If citizen journalism is our future, who will do the necessary research and investigation? Can private contributions cover all functions of mainstream media?

### **We need professional journalists to provide for the whole picture**

Let's have a look at business journalism. A market economy depends on professional business journalists. Individual statements by shareholders and various stakeholders are no substitute for company profiles delivered by independent professional journalists. Healthcare reform is another example. It is such a complex issue. Citizens who make the effort to express themselves might be angry about the costs they must bear, be it in form of insurance premiums, taxes or other healthcare costs. What we need are journalists and media companies who grasp the whole picture.

Moreover, netizenship does not extend to the masses. There are a lot of marginalised people in poor countries. The illiterate can hardly make use of the web. The goal therefore must be to establish civic lib-

erties throughout society, and not only in niches of the world wide web. Net activism can be a means to that end, but it is not the end itself.

Serious players on the market are continuously offering innovative answers to the changes in society and the challenges of technological progress. There is no other choice. Organisations are no longer able to respond to the environmental changes using the same structures, mindsets or strategies that have worked in the past. The web is here to stay, and we all have to develop new skills to fully benefit from all our new possibilities.

I am looking forward to an exciting debate on citizen journalism versus the possibilities of the professional media in the internet age.

Complex issues cannot be covered by citizens who just might be angry. Somebody has to work out the bigger picture and check the facts: the professional journalist.





Many developing nations are catching up in terms of global communication. The new voices which can now be heard represent knowledge. For Sebastian Paust of InWEnt it is crucial to build upon this knowledge to push global development.

## Strengthening civil society through diverse media

Welcome address by Dr Sebastian Paust, CEO of InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany

State Secretary, Mr Gerschermann and Mr D'Inka, Mrs Kohl, excellencies, ladies and gentleman, distinguished guests, I am delighted to welcome you to this conference. I am also very glad that InWEnt and the FAZ have managed to turn the first event in 2008 into a series of conferences that have since become an important forum in which developments in the German media, the media of industrialised countries and the media of developing and emerging countries are discussed.

“Would you fly with a civilian dressed as a pilot?” I came across this question in the documentation of the first IJ-FAZ conference as a response to a question on the role of citizen journalists. That was in 2008. My impression is that the media's perception has since changed and that, more and

more, they are attempting to let the public participate, a change from which both sides are profiting. Although Germany is not at the forefront of this development, the trend is visible here, too. Other regions, especially African and Asian countries, are benefiting enormously from the rapid developments of information and communication technology.

### Free media strengthen civil society

InWEnt is deeply interested in intensifying the dialogue between the German media and that of our partner countries. We believe in further education and development, in capacity building aimed at strengthening our partners' abilities to plan and implement viable development strategies. Good governance is a key factor

for the sustainable development of democracy, the economy and the society. What is needed is greater transparency and an increased political role on the part of civil society; greater accountability by the government towards its citizens is simply not attainable without powerful and independent media and a diversified media landscape with a multitude of voices.

InWEnt's International Institute for Journalism has been supporting media houses in our partner countries for decades. Our programmes bring journalists from all over the world to Germany, where they learn the ins and outs of German editorial demands through discussions with experts and media companies in the field. It is precisely this practical experience that inspires participants in our programmes



to broaden the scope of their work and discover new areas within their professional field back at home.

### **Networks as a central element of development cooperation**

Changes and development can only be achieved through dialogue. They demand intense, open and hands-on exchange. In the past decades, it has been information and communication technologies in particular that have fundamentally changed the prerequisites for knowledge and information exchange. Nowadays, in the face of ever-increasing globalisation, networks are becoming a central element of development cooperation. A global exchange of knowledge drives openness, freedom and democracy and also presents a range of possibilities for cross-border learning.

This is exactly why InWEnt has placed increased emphasis on establishing networking as an instrument for capacity building over the past few years. We focus expressly on internet-based activities. To

this end, we have created the Global Campus 21®, the world's largest learning and communication platform in development cooperation. Each year, we register about 10,000 new users. Our e-learning centre is the competency centre for e-learning in German development cooperation. We will soon be launching our E-Academy, which will offer a broad range of e-learning products for use in the field of development cooperation, something which is increasingly in demand in our partner countries, be it in Asia, Africa or Latin America.

Actively working with our alumni is an important part of building networks. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the German alumni portal, a collaborative project of several German institutions led by InWEnt and developed for German alumni all over the world. Minister Niebel recently launched the portal in Vietnam for the Asian market, making it possible for Asian alumni to keep in touch with each other, as well as network with both German

and local companies and identify collaborative opportunities.

### **Developing nations are catching up with regards to the digital world**

The digital divide is, of course, far from being bridged. For many, the digital world is still out of reach. And yet we are witnessing how many developing nations are catching up and how, first and foremost, it is the mobile phone which is revolutionising communication. This is opening the public sphere up to those who, until now, had no platform to express their interests, make themselves heard and build networks. These voices represent knowledge; knowledge we should build upon if we want to jointly push through changes and reforms. As the British writer Hugh Carleton Greene once put it: show me a country where politicians and journalists agree, and I'll tell you: it won't be a democracy. I wish you all a lively and interesting debate and a successful media conference.

Digital media are opening up the public sphere to those who previously had no means to make themselves heard.

# Free access to the media is essential for good governance

Opening address by Hans-Jürgen Beerfeltz,  
State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation and Development  
(BMZ)

Dear Dr Roland Gerschermann, Mr Werner D'Inka, Dr Sebastian Paust, Mrs Astrid Kohl, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the honour of inaugurating this third media conference, which has been organised by the International Institute for Journalism (IIJ) of InWEnt – Capacity Building International, Germany, together with the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ).

There are three reasons why it is so important for me to be here with you today. Firstly, this event is how I imagine a public private partnership to be. I am exceptionally glad that we are dealing with a joint venture between the private sector and public development cooperation. A newspaper, which is a private media company, and a state-run organisation, in this case a ministry, jointly promoting free media in developing countries and emerging economies.

The second reason: I thoroughly enjoy the topic. Those who have known me for a long time are possibly aware that I, born way back, was already working intensely with the internet as far back as 18 years ago at the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) here in Germany. Back then, the first steps

in the development of the internet were underway, namely the establishment of the first networks, networking with one another, finding faster ways to access information, and making life easier through the use of new technology. The path the internet would ultimately take was predetermined, and has developed accordingly ever since.

Today, we are standing on the threshold of individualised communication. Communication is becoming more individual and people's opinions are being shaped less and less by the media. Communication theory explains that there is one information sender, and there are media and information receivers. Nowadays, the recipients themselves are becoming senders. They are turning into disseminators of information and, of course, opinions. There is, of course, ample opportunity in this scenario. However, when scrutinised more critically from the standpoint of what is true, the truth here can be a bit murky. The receivers are confronted with more and more information which it is quite easy to stumble over. It is sometimes difficult to navigate one's way through these vague truths. Information is becoming more and more ubiquitous, and easier to access, and is spreading faster. And there



Hans-Jürgen Beerfeltz has been involved with the internet for the last 18 years. At last that long he has been taken a stand to strengthen media literacy in schools and civil society.

will constantly be more, which does not exactly bode well for the navigation of it. As the information load increases, its navigability decreases.

Finally, the third reason why I am glad to be here and why I am so impressed by this event held by InWEnt is this: free access to the media is a key requirement for a diverse civil society. An alert and critical civil society is the prerequisite for good governance – one of the core areas of the new administration of the BMZ. We want to foster good governance. But without more transparency and partner countries with actively involved civil societies which scrutinise their government's policies and actions and are permitted to express themselves critically, it will be hard to establish a sustainable good governance.

The BMZ fosters civil society involvement. It is exactly this area that is currently being strengthened in the context of the final negotiations of the German Bundestag regarding the new budget of the Federal Ministry of Finance. We will do more for churches, foundations and non-governmental organisations because we want a diverse civil society in Germany

that is able to work together with like-minded diverse civil societies in our partner countries. A decisive instrument for this achievement is the encouragement of free media.

This is why I consider InWEnt's International Institute for Journalism to be an especially important instrument for our development cooperation. By training print and online journalists we are strengthening free media. And through the freedom of opinion and press in our partner countries we are strengthening good governance. Therefore, I want to explicitly thank the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung for having made this joint programme possible. At the FAZ, as one of their great advertisement goes, the smart thinkers are not just behind the newspaper but also in the editorial department and the administration.

## Fostering the media as a way of fostering democracy

At the awards ceremony of the German media prize in Berlin a few weeks ago the German chancellor Angela Merkel said: "The media are a motor for decision-making in state and society." Independent media do not only provide information but also critically question and reveal and, in doing so, make governmental action more transparent to the general public. Unprivileged social groups are especially able to express themselves and participate in politics by means of independent media. That is why the BMZ fosters independent media in our partner countries and thus the freedom of information which comes along with independent media. This is decisive for a free, democratic civil society. "The press is the artillery of freedom," as the former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher once put it quite ominously.

The success proves us right. In December 2008, a young Kyrgyz journalist was

awarded the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights. She had reported via an independent community radio on the death of a young Kyrgyz who had to work in Kazakhstan in slave-like conditions. German development cooperation has actively fostered and financed the independent community radio where the journalist is working.

## New media allow for new forms of civil protest

New media like the internet or mobile communication provide many new possibilities, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, especially in developing countries. Twitter and YouTube, for example, enable us to express ourselves in public and gain access to information and public opinions without having an internet connection of our own. All you need to spread the word and make yourself visible to a local, national, and even worldwide community is an internet café.

We have most effectively seen this phenomenon in action in Iran, where individual Iranians published information via Twitter, which the Iranian government could no longer ignore. An audience of more than 20,000 people was reached and the mainstream media used the Twitter news to report on the situation in Iran at a global level. Twitter created a means for evading censorship.

It is especially new media which allow for new forms of civil protest. New media enable global access to information from within dictatorships that would otherwise be inaccessible. New media foster participation, transparency and thus democracy. But we should not be too euphoric. There are always two sides to every coin. New media have generated a new information overload that for many of us is a strain. We are all confronted with the overwhelming

challenge of filtering relevant information out of this deluge of news.

People need a lifeline in this flood of information. They need media literacy, something which we have to further promote. For more than 20 years I have taken a stand for the strengthening of media literacy in schools and elsewhere in Germany. With this new media, it is all the more important to generate knowledge and with that knowledge keener powers of judgement. Transparency and participation in particular are promoted by new media which transmit high quality and reliable content. This makes further education so important. Further education provides users with the journalistic tools and thus the specific quality standards we also need in citizen journalism.

In developing countries there is also the question of freedom of information. According to a recent study by the organisation "Reporters Without Borders," the internet is censored in 60 states worldwide. Last year 120 bloggers were arrested and convicted. This is a distressingly new all time high for something as simple as expressing one's opinion. 120 convicted bloggers and internet dissidents are currently in prison. In Germany we must take the utmost care when talking about internet restrictions, because we are simultaneously addressing restrictions of freedom. Freedom is a very precious gift that we should not destroy by aspiring to an all too comprehensive censorship. Germany must take responsibility for setting a good example in terms of transparency, democracy and freedom of opinion. Of course, there is a lot of rubbish on the internet. We have to fight this rubbish in our heads and not through the machines. One way of fighting is through media literacy. We should follow the good examples of other states that have expanded the protection of basic rights for freedom of information. I personally stand, without doubt, in favour of a basic right to free internet access.

Access to the internet and to new media varies heavily in our partner coun-



Just a few years ago a picture taken by a civilian would have stayed just that: a picture. The internet and other digital media have paved the way for everybody to add valuable information to the media society.

tries. In South Africa for example a large part of the population has internet access. But according to estimates by the International Telecommunication Union, the situation is very different in Sub-Saharan Africa. About 55 percent of the rural population still does not have access to any telecommunication media.

Another example: a DSL connection in Germany costs about 30 euros per month. In Nigeria a comparable connection costs about 600 euros – this is nearly 900 percent of the per capita income. Thus the poorer of the global population have to pay more for the internet than the richer. This constitutes a barrier for the freedom of the world wide web and for the freedom of internet access. Thus the digital revolution reveals further forms of exclusion. The majority of the global population is not yet able to participate in the global political debate by means of new media due to their financial situation, social status or geographic position.

The BMZ supports access to the new media. In cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union we promote regulatory measures in the states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), so that newly established networks also extend to rural populations.

This way it is not only the profitable big cities which are receiving access. Such measures arise from a combination of subsidies and certain licences for network operators to guarantee that investments are also made in the rural networks.

## Digital media as a challenge to the mainstream media

Finally, I would like to mention the fact that digital media are challenging mainstream media. They do so not only in respect to the requirements of print media but also, and above all, in respect to the information usage of young people.

Mainstream media have lost their news monopoly. How do media groups react to the growing challenge that is “citizen journalism?” What is the situation like in the newsrooms, where agreements are made on what is to be transmitted, by which media and to what audience? What will the media world look like in ten years time? Will there be a form of journalism based on cooperation, in which mainstream media are completely interconnected with citizen journalism? In my opinion, yes.

This is an unstoppable trend. It is even made evident by the great works the many brilliant journalists from all over the world will present during this conference today. Other prime examples can be seen in the framework of our media development cooperation, which is carried out in part by political foundations in Germany.

Educational work in general shows us that we nowadays educate bloggers rather than teachers and employ bloggers in our media programmes as trainers. It is not only participants in the media programmes, but also politicians who are educated in these new techniques. One positive side aspect to be seen in the political arena is the existence of training for more openness, more participation and more integration of the will of the people. This in turn fosters democracy, not only in developing countries but also in Germany. New media open the door for participatory journalism. They give a voice to those who previously went unheard, those who had to remain in the shadows. With this conference we are establishing ties between civil society and the state, between mainstream and new media. I am looking forward to hearing the contributions of our guests from all over the world and to the subsequent discussion. Thank you for your attention.



To really be global means to make information also available in other languages than English. Solana Larsen of Global Voices has helped to add to the global community by following the blogging scene for years and developing adequate projects.

## The world is talking – let it be heard

*Keynote by Solana Larsen, managing editor of Global Voices, USA*

Listening to people who are concerned by certain events may add a new perspective on things and how to evaluate them. Blogs, twitter feeds and other contributions by citizen journalists can complement the coverage by the established media. Global Voices is such a project. It aims to give people a voice who formerly did not even have the chance of being heard. Solana Larsen, managing editor of Global Voices, talks about its difference and why Global Voices is so valuable.

Hello and thank you for having me. In my job at Global Voices I help manage a virtual newsroom of bloggers who report on world events by quoting and translating from blogs and citizen media worldwide. Global Voices was created five years ago at Harvard University's Bergman Center for Internet and Society. It is a research centre at Harvard.

The reason it was created was building on the idea that even though the world wide web connects everyone, most people are still only reading about their own daily life and their own reality. You do not really see people reaching across borders reading the

content from other countries. Global Voices was created to try and help fix that, try to encourage people to read one another, and try to make it easier for them to do so. Our slogan is: "The world is talking – Are you listening?"

Over the years we have created a global community of more than 200 bloggers and translators who work with our part-time editors. We report on the activities and the topics that concern bloggers and citizen journalists worldwide, with special emphasis on developing countries and marginalized voices within them.

### Global Voices offers a different kind of journalism

Global Voices is a different window on world news, a different way of experiencing it. You might see a story on Global Voices which titles: “What do gay bloggers in Uganda think about their government stance on homosexuality?” Or: “How are Thai bloggers preparing for a city-wide Bangkok protest of citizens dressed in red T-shirts?” It is the kind of citizen journalism that begins on a personal website of a few individuals and then is adapted into an article that tells a broader story on Global Voices.

Right from the start of Global Voices we realised that internet censorship is a huge problem in most of the world. We decided that we needed to do something for the sake of our community. So Global Voices created an advocacy organization that keeps watch of bloggers who have been censored, threatened or arrested. On our advocacy website we try to keep track of online repression of free speech. We also try to motivate activists to work together to fight censorship.

Earlier this year we created yet another website called Threatened Voices. It is a world map on which we track cases of threats or arrests against bloggers. Just to remind you why this is so important: On March 18, 2009, exactly one year ago, the first blogger died in a prison in Iran.

### Global communication must be multi-lingual

If everything on our website was in English, the conversation would never be truly global. That is why volunteers started translating our content first into Chinese and French. Since then we have added more than 15 languages to our line-up of Global Voices websites. The volunteers choose the stories that they themselves are most interested in and translate them into other languages. The Chinese, Italian and many other different language versions of the Global Voices website are almost identical to the English one.

What we also realised from the beginning is that the first people to make blogging popular in a poor country usually belong to the elite – or to a diaspora community abroad that pushes for development. In places where few people are connected to the internet locally, bloggers often start writing in English and then, later, they look to the outside world for an audience, because their own population maybe is not that well connected. Even later on, as they can expect to gain more readers in their own countries, they switch to local languages. We have been following the blogging scene over the past five years. What we learned has helped to form the way that we do things. We developed the Rising Voices project, a micro-grant fund, in order to address the digital divide. So far we have funded 22 blogging projects, including in Liberia, Yemen, Columbia, Madagascar and the Ukraine. We invested maybe 2,000 or 3,000 dollars in getting them started. About 15 of the projects are still active.

### Bloggers are everywhere, mainstream media are not

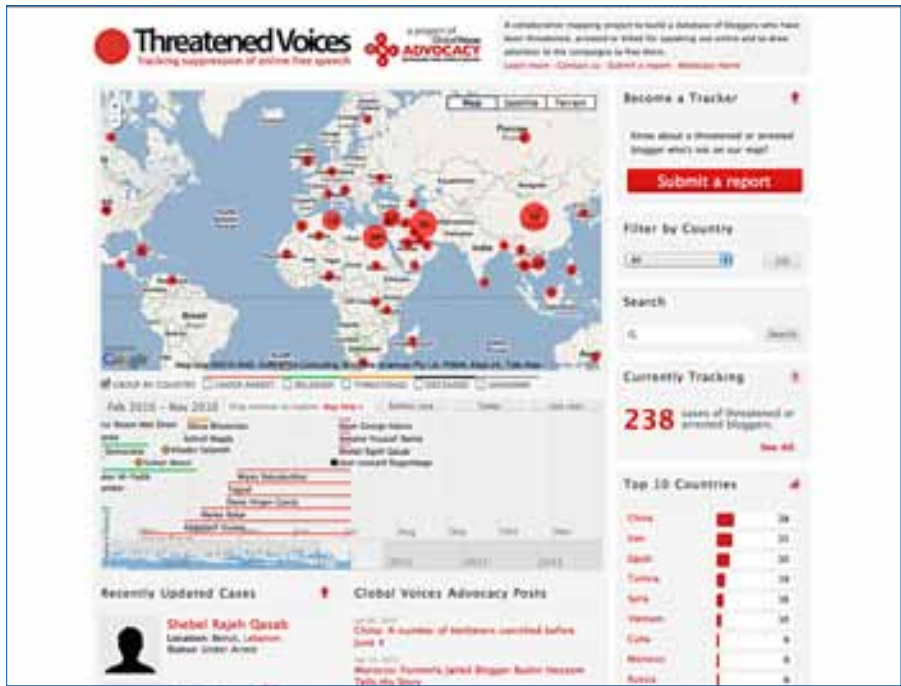
There is still another project I want to tell you about. For the last two weeks I have been working with the BBC News website editors in London. The goal of our project was to explore how citizen media could help inform the foreign news coverage of the BBC and vice versa. We added Global Voices links to certain BBC news stories, where we felt that a citizen media perspective could complement what they were doing. In some cases we looked for stories that Global Voices had by putting an ear to world bloggers that the BBC themselves did not have – yet. We learned two main lessons: Global Voices was able to complement what the BBC was doing when we were fast and when we were different.

We were different, for instance, from a straight news story about a women’s bill in India. The BBC story made you feel as though if you were for women’s rights you should be for this bill, because it would bring more women into parliament. Global Voices added depth of perspective through blogger voices that showed why even some feminists were against the idea. Because, that was one of the many arguments we heard, the bill was not making the representation more diverse. It was benefiting women from certain families, wives of former politicians. By adding a link to the Global Voices story on the BBC’s, we felt that this was a way how we could work together.

Another instance where we were able to contribute something of value was a story on a Mapuche indigenous community in Chile. There had been a lot of talk about Chile after the earthquake and about different areas of destruction. But even in the Chilean press the indigenous population, the Mapuche indigenous community, received almost no coverage at all. Their area was severely damaged during the earthquake. Global Voices had a story about how the indigenous communities were using blogs and citizen media, uploading YouTube videos of destruction and calling out to the Chilean population to listen to their plight. BBC did not have this story. We were able to write up a report that described what was happening, with links to the indigenous blogs. The project proofed that there are ways for Global Voices to complement what the BBC is already doing. But there are also ways to cover stories that journalists themselves cannot find, because nobody can be everywhere all the time.

### Citizen and professional journalism complement each other

The structure of Global Voices really lets the stories come from ground up. As an editor I would not usually say to people that I need a story about this or I want a story about that. I cannot read Chinese or Bangladeshi. I need people who understand those local communities and who understand that language to tell me what is important to them. This is a different way of thinking about editorial news flow. In some cases it allows interesting stories to



Threatened Voices is a collaborative mapping project to build a database of bloggers who have been threatened, arrested or killed for speaking out online. Since it is a project of the Global Voices advocacy project it aims at helping these bloggers and therefore fosters free speech and press freedom all over the world.

come to light. The problem is that Global Voices is not written by professionals. Global Voices relies mostly on volunteers, and that is why we are sometimes slower than a 24/7 news organisation. Working with the BBC helped giving me a lot of ideas for what we could do better. Moreover, it renewed my feeling that what we do is valuable, because it's different from what they do. I do not think that citizen media exists in opposition to mainstream journalism. The two need to work together and learn from each other with an open mind.

**During the Madagascar coup bloggers offered first hand information**

As an international community Global Voices tends to celebrate those instances where bloggers and online communities are heard in the international media. One of our earliest funders was the news agency Reuters, and one of our co-founders was the former Beijing-Bureau chief for CNN. Being heard in the mainstream media is not the only criteria for successful citizen journalism. Nor is it usually the end goal for the people involved in the projects themselves. These are local citizens and they will usually be more focused on the interests of their community that is at the centre of their concerns. One project Rising Voices funded was a Madagascar blogging community, a group of socially minded young people. They got together to train youth in blogging in 2007. They were really tired of the fact that most people associated the word "Madagascar" with a Disney movie of the same name. Many of the blog-

ger teachers were Diaspora bloggers, Madagascar citizens abroad, who were training new bloggers, teenagers often, over instant messenger via computers. These young people started doing really cool things.

The first break-through moment for this blogging club came when one of the bloggers met a young woman whose baby was in desperate need of an operation. The blogger decided to use her blog for fundraising to buy this baby an operation. They were really able to raise the money, both with help outside and inside the country. This was when the young bloggers from Madagascar realised that they could use this communication tool to really make change. Many months later political events in Madagascar led to rioting and killing in the streets. The bloggers never intended to act as news service but they had the newly learned skills to do it. In those first days, many Madagasy outside the country relied on the stories of the bloggers to know what was going on. As international interest grew, they ended up in newspapers, television and radio in the United States, France and worldwide. The bloggers combined first hand reporting with analysis while the mainstream media in Madagascar was biased, threatened and really scared of threats from both army and political supporters.

Once things calmed down, the bloggers hosted a meeting to discuss their activities, which was also attended by several journalists, former journalists and even the former Minister of Culture. In February 2010, the bloggers started organizing workshops in blogging and Twitter for journalists and social workers in Madagascar.



When Solana Larsen speaks about the power of citizen journalism and its impact on the media she is always expressing her deep conviction that citizens are making a difference by providing powerful public information.

### **Bloggers help the diaspora communities to stay in touch**

Citizens can get involved in helping to change the media agenda, both locally and internationally. A lot of the time it is actually the bloggers who are ahead of mainstream media and need to teach them the value of engaging with online communities. The Global Voices office in Malawi for example has had many of its blog posts republished in local newspapers. There were also bloggers' stories which made their way into radio broadcast media in France, Taiwan and the United States and even into television in Egypt and Paraguay.

But it is not always easy. Since the beginning of March I have been getting emails from the founder of another Rising Voices project which is called "Ceasefire Liberia." It is a blogging platform with volunteer writers in Monrovia and in Staten Island in New York, where there is a large community of Liberian refugees. They share this blogging platform to share their experiences. The original goal was to create a bridge between the Liberian community and the New York refugee community but surprisingly it have mainly been the Liberian bloggers who have been doing most of the writing. Just recently, they have been trying to get international attention for a new outburst of violence that they have experienced between christians and muslims. For several reasons the international media, including the BBC, have not been interested in picking up the story yet. The local media are inadequate – I've

been told that an average journalist in Liberia makes about 40 euros a month, so that is the reason why.

Indeed, building a movement of volunteer citizen journalists is really not easy. Nobody has extra time or money for internet cafés. In spite of this, the "Ceasefire Liberia" team has been writing some great stories about what has been happening. They are realising their power and are trying to learn how to use it, watching what the bloggers in Madagascar and elsewhere are doing and trying to figure out how they can draw attention to what is happening in their country.

### **Media workshops back up citizen journalists**

A different Rising Voices projects is "Hyper Barrio" in Columbia, a collective of new Columbian bloggers who have teamed up with local libraries hosting media workshops in their cities' working class neighbourhoods. One of their early successes was when they were doing local community journalism, trying to get young people involved in writing about what they saw. They discovered the family history of a character in their community whom they used to call "Dirty Suso." When they interviewed him it turned out that his family had actually been wealthy and that he had donated the land for the library that they have used for their blogging workshops. After the death of his family his house fell apart and he was living in a ruin. The bloggers got together, told the story of his life



and started engaging the community in rebuilding his house. With this they convinced the rest of Columbia that their community La Loma – an isolated spot in the mountains – was a nice place to visit and a good place to live. They did an excellent job of putting their village on the map, both nationally and internationally.

### **Citizen journalists are needed in remote areas where international journalists are rare**

Rising Voices funded still another project, in Yemen, where a young woman organises new media training courses for female politicians, activists and human rights workers. The goal is to build an online network of women who fight for their rights. Ironically their biggest challenge with regards to blogging has not been censorship but inconsistent electricity and access to the internet. Still they have managed to train about 112 women, about 24 are still writing in their blogs.

The Mongolian project “Nomad Greens” is about training Mongolian citizen journalists how to use blogs, digital video and podcasts to report on local environmental news in Mongolian, Chinese and in English. Some of the content actually is also in German. Climate change is a huge problem for nomadic communities in Mongolia, and this winter has been the coldest winter ever. About 20 million farm animals may die which is said to be a very large disaster. You can imagine that there are not that many international journalists in Mongolia. If you search for information online you are not likely to find very much else than this project. It was created by the Mongolian & Tibetan Foundation of Taiwan, and it is still new. But one measure of success so far has been that the Mongolian Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism has just begun following them on Twitter.

### **Passion and purpose are crucial**

In a developing world context, especially where it is complicated to deal with lack of electricity and slow internet and often long travel to the destinations where you have internet access, people need a very strong sense of purpose to keep going. Let me be straight about this: people do not do this kind of thing just for the sake of doing it. They do not submit lots of free content and photos to a newspaper or a website just because you ask them to. Moreover,

it is not that this content will automatically be interesting to read. Citizen media projects do not always produce the most exciting stories. You can train a dozen people how to blog and only one or two of them will be really good. You can even have a clear goal for what your citizen media project will be but you cannot always expect that people, the individuals involved, will always write what you think they should write. There is nothing magical about a blog.

Most of the people we work with at Global Voices do not think of themselves in terms of journalism. Part of the idea is for people to find a venue of self-expression and to give them the tools and the flexibility to rise to the challenge when the occasion calls for it, whether it is for the World Cup or a cultural event or a national crisis. What people may lack in technical skills or in writing skills they usually make up for with passion and integrity for what they are doing.

### **Citizen journalism is powerful public information**

One way that online citizen media is really coming into focus in developing countries is through initiatives that are aimed at increasing citizen engagement in their own societies. The Rising Voices project “Technology for Transparency Network” has engaged an international research team of bloggers who is mapping projects that do things with technology to engage citizens. For instance, in Guatemala you have representatives of more than 41 organisations who are describing the selection process of nominees for public offices. This is not information that their own ministry has put online, but they have taken it upon themselves to explain how public officials are elected. In Ghana, there is an online information portal that is covering and monitoring elections in ten different African countries and in three different languages. In Israel, citizens have converted the Tel Aviv municipal budget from a PDF-file that nobody looks at to a spreadsheet format with visualisations that you can click on online.

Is this kind of thing citizen journalism? I think it is certainly powerful public information of a kind that previously required journalists to help tell the story. In this regard I think citizens and journalists can do a lot of good by working together. Perhaps this would be a good time to remind ourselves as we continue the conversation today that in fact journalists are citizens, too.



Steven Lang and his team at Grocott's Mail have realised that their newspaper profits from citizen journalists' stories. In South Africa, though, they do not only have to support citizen journalists as such, but see to it that the poorer residents are involved as receivers and contributors to the mass media, as well.

# Water polo vs. no water: Citizen journalism has to support marginalised communities

*Keynote by Steven Lang, editor of Grocott's Mail, South Africa*

Grocott's Mail is one of the oldest independent newspapers in South Africa. And it is a platform for experimental journalism. The project "Lindaba Ziyafika" encourages journalism which is produced by non-professionals. Steven Lang, editor of Grocott's Mail, talks about the pros and cons of citizen journalism.

Ladies and gentlemen, bhotani manene nani manenekazi. I have just greeted you in isiXhosa, the dominant language in Eastern Cape. Afrikaans and English are also spoken in the province but most newspapers and websites are in English. I come from Grahamstown, a place that most of you might have never heard of. It is a place in South Africa that is considered an old historic relic, even though it is not yet 200 years old. Residents like to define Grahamstown as an educational town because we host the Rhodes University, and we also host several very prestigious private schools. But, what people do not like to talk

about is the fact that we also have some of the most impoverished schools in the province.

South Africa is a country where, 16 years after our first democratic elections, the disjunctions of privilege and poverty engineered through 300 years of apartheid are still all too evident. The vast gap between the haves and the have-nots in Grahamstown is starkly highlighted in the following tale of the two Andrews. One of the oldest schools in the country, St. Andrew's College, is in Grahamstown. The students there have a rugby director and various rugby coaches. They have a

swimming coach, a water-polo coach, a ballet teacher and a ballet-teacher assistant. Actually, they have the best teachers in the country because they pay the highest salaries. This is just to give you an idea that St. Andrew's College is a place of privilege.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the Andrew Moyaye School which is one of the poorest schools in the area. Until very recently, they had no water in the school at all. There were no functioning taps, and even the toilets had no water. The children had to use their break time and go to a tap outside the school with buckets for water.

We at the newspaper did a story about this and we published several articles with some quite dramatic pictures to show readers how serious the situation is at the school. And when we made a lot of pressure, eventually, the authorities started fixing up the schools. Now they have the taps. But the minute we look away, things fall apart very quickly. And the disparities are still huge. The consequences of this disparity will be felt in South Africa for many decades to come.

Although St. Andrews is a very privileged school and there is money all over the place – sometimes the parents fly in from Johannesburg in a helicopter – St. Andrews has an outreach programme in order to try and lend a hand to people in other schools. They have hired a maths teacher. She has a Ph.D. in mathematics and was hired specifically to go and teach mathematics at some of the less privileged schools.

### **Citizen journalism in Grahamstown depends on cell phones**

However, I have not come here all the way to Berlin to tell you about the sociological problems in Grahamstown or in South Africa. The main focus of my presentation is to tell you about “Lindaba Ziyafika,” a citizen journalism project in Grahamstown. It is a joint project run by Rhodes University, and it is done on the premises of Grocott’s Mail, where I am the editor-in-chief of the print edition. Grocott’s Mail with its headquarters in the very centre of Grahamstown proudly describes itself as the oldest independent newspaper in the country. We will be celebrating 140 years of operations in May this year. The newspaper Grocott’s Mail has been owned by Rhodes University’s Journalism Department since 2003, and besides being a significant source of information for the community it is also used as a platform for experimental journalism.

The citizen journalism project that I am telling you about today is funded by the US based Knight Foundation. It is only one of several experimental projects that we

conduct at Grocott’s Mail. “Lindaba Ziyafika” – this is Xhosa again and it means “The news is coming” – is the title of our project that is characterised by two major thrusts: Firstly, the innovative use of mobile phones and information within the community of Grahamstown. Secondly, we try to equip media producers in the town and – more broadly – in the country, and to a certain extent in the rest of the continent, so that they, the producers, can fully utilize this media. The main objectives of “Lindaba Ziyafika” include the involvement of the poorer residents as receivers and contributors to Grocott’s Mail’s multiple platforms. This means radio, print, cell phones, and we are currently experimenting with putting video content on our website.

Moreover, we are developing a body of knowledge about cell phones as media platforms. We are using cell phones to receive news via text messages and we are also using them to produce news, again via text messages and photographs.

In addition, while we are training citizen journalists, we are also developing a body of knowledge on how to train. With this body of knowledge we are busy compiling a training manual so that it can be used in other parts of the country, and also in other parts of Africa.

### **Citizen journalism is about how to contribute, not just receive**


The “Lindaba Ziyafika” project has several sub-projects: One of them is involved in spreading the word, in spreading citizen journalism efforts into other parts of the country and into other African countries, as well. We also have a special section that is trying to develop a sustainable business model for citizen journalism.

So, what is citizen journalism? There are many different ideas about what constitutes citizen journalism, and I do not think that right now there is anything like consensus on what the term means. This has not stopped us proceeding with the project. Loosely speaking, it is journal-

ism produced by non-professionals. It can take various forms including text, images, video and audio. It can make use of a wide range of tools such as cell phones, computers, audio recorders or even just a pen and paper. It is not covered by the regular media, so we exclude here parliamentary sittings for ministerial addresses.

In most cases, citizen journalism takes place in a defined community. Sometimes this is geographically defined, but not necessarily. And we often hear in this context the buzz word “hyper local”. When Rhodes University took over Grocott’s Mail in 2003, it served mainly the white middle class population of Grahamstown. Rhodes University installed a new editor, my predecessor’s predecessor, and changed the newspaper. It changed the policies to serve a broader community including all the residents of the community. This broader community has become used to receiving news that is relevant to them. Now “Lindaba Ziyafika” is showing residents how to become contributors to the news, as well. However, in order to become contributors, residents need to learn how to do this. We therefore set up a training newsroom with ten computers at Grocott’s Mail, where we could train prospective citizen journalists, and also provide a space where the students can practice what they have learned.

One of the main objectives of “Lindaba Ziyafika” is to teach people, mainly residents from the underprivileged sections of our community, how to become citizen journalists. We have focused our initial training on young people, high school pupils, because many of them already use cell phones for texting and other social media. We believe that the younger generation will be far more amenable to new ways of using technology, and this is proven true. In addition, we find that sometimes high school pupils do not have any particular recreational programmes. Then it is easy for them to get into trouble. We created the Upstart project to give some kind of focus to some of these high school pupils.



The course work is essentially very practical and hands-on. To give you an example: After explaining techniques on how to conduct an interview, we will bring in a guest, so that students can try out the newly acquired skills on a real subject. Only a few days before I left Grahamstown to come here the students had convinced a municipal spokesperson to come in and be subjected to an interview. Although it was set up as a training exercise, he also realised that any information that he might share with the students could end up on our website or even in the printed edition of the newspaper.

We teach our students how to do basic research and how to access sources of information such as contacting experts at the university or doing basic Google searches. And in many cases we have to teach people how to use a phone-book – because they have never had one before. As the cell phone is the most basic tool common to citizen journalists – we are not talking about the latest smartphones or iPhones – we spend quite some time explaining how to get the best results from normal cell phones. This means we teach them how to use the text facility and when they have cameras – we teach basic photography skills, as well. Our plan is to identify students with the best potential during their courses, and when the course ends, we will invite them to begin participating in some of the activities of our newsroom. We are also searching for the early adopters of this new way of doing journalism.

### **More sources, greater depth: citizen journalism has an impact**

The question is: what can citizen journalism do that traditional media cannot do? At Grocott's Mail we are very interested in citizen journalism because it greatly increases our coverage of issues and events that are of immediate relevance to our target readership. Through citizen journalism we have more sources of information, and we also

have greater depth on issues that we would normally cover only superficially.

We have had some significant successes with cell phone journalism. For example, several pupils who had gone through our training alerted us to a problem in one of the high schools where teachers would not come to class but would instead go drinking at a local tavern. They texted information to us that we could not have received from any other source. We then published some of these messages and eventually, the school administration stopped the pupils from using cell phones and would not allow them to speak to the media when we sent a reporter – but they were too late because we already had the story.

What impact does citizen journalism have at community level? At our newspaper we believe it is important to maintain close contact with the community we serve. Citizen journalism and innovative use of new media technology are helping what was essentially an old media organisation to achieve this goal. By developing citizen journalism in our newspaper, we are strengthening our relationship with our readers. This is good for the community, and that really is good for us, the newspaper, as well.

An interesting aspect of citizen journalism is that by publishing articles about issues that are important in the community, that same community is able to put pressure on local authorities. This works very well with our municipal authorities, and to some extent, we have been able to exert pressure on provincial authorities.

An example of citizen journalism having an impact on the community is evident in our coverage of the trash problem on our streets. Garbage is a big problem in Grahamstown and in the entire municipal area of Makana. Our web editor created a special section on the website dedicated to highlighting the trash problem. It is called "Ukucoca eMakana," which means "Makana Cleanup." As part of the course

work, all the students doing last year's citizen journalism course were required to write stories with photographs about the litter problem in the area. We published the best ones on this particular page and selected a few for publication in our print edition. Our print edition stories were very well received. Our efforts at covering this problem do not unfortunately mean that Grahamstown is now a clean town. But at least the authorities know that we are watching them.

### **Internet penetration in South Africa is still rather low**

For citizen journalism, the tool of choice is the cell phone. The broader population of Grahamstown is impoverished, most people do not have access to computers, and probably more than half of the residents are not computer literate. This is a problem in Grahamstown and also a problem in South Africa, where the internet penetration in a population of over 45 million is less than ten percent. It is quite a low percentage. But in spite of this low computer penetration, there is a significant cell phone penetration. At a conservative estimate, more than 80 percent over the age of 16 have cell phones. Consequently, the cell phone is the main tool of citizen journalism in Grahamstown and, most probably, in South Africa, as in the rest of the continent. There are problems though, because although the cost of an SMS is very cheap by European standards, less than one tenth of a euro for an SMS, this is a significant amount of money in a family where no one has a job. The unemployment rate is very high in Grahamstown.

We have experimented in our "Lindaba Ziyafika" project with subsidising air time – giving people a certain amount of money for their cell phone accounts, or by paying them for each tip-off or story we use. But so far we have not found an ideal method of compensation.



The open-source project Ushahidi allows text messages to be mapped by time and location with the help of Google. Originally, it was developed to track reports of ethnic violence in Kenya in 2008. By now, the crowd-sourcing tool is used by eyewitnesses of war and crisis in out-of-reach places all over the world.

### Spreading the word – citizen journalism in broadcast media

Another part of our “Lindaba Ziyafika” citizen journalism project is that we are experimenting with radio. “Iizwi Labahlali” – “The voice of the citizens” is Grahamstown’s first radio show that is for the most part produced and presented by citizen journalists. The weekly show is jointly hosted by the regular anchor and a citizen journalist. Most of the show is in Xhosa. If you like to listen to it, if you are curious to hear what a radio station in Xhosa sounds like, you can go along to the [Grocotts.co.za](http://Grocotts.co.za)-site.

Last November, we aired four editions of the show on the Radio Grahamstown community station which is a non-profit organisation set up by the members of the community for the benefit of that same community – and since this objective dovetails well with our objectives we have had no problems cooperating with the Radio Grahamstown management. The board that is supposed to run Radio Grahamstown is in disarray, and the station is poorly managed. Sometimes the station goes off air because no one has enough money for pre-paid electricity. Consequently they were pleased when “Lindaba Ziyafika” offered them relevant content, some organisational structure and some equipment to help them along. Radio Grahamstown is in a precarious situation, and we are working with it, but at the same time, we are reluctant to get too involved because we do not want to appear that we are taking over the station. We want them to continue to own the station but we need to put in some structure there to ensure that there is good governance.

Grocott’s Mail is not the only organisation experimenting with citizen journalism in South Africa. In January 2006, the Avusa group of newspapers launched a site called [reporter.co.za](http://reporter.co.za). It was a joint venture of Avusa papers that included the Sunday Times, a national newspaper with the highest weekend circulation, the

Sowetan, published in Johannesburg but with widespread circulation in other major centres, the Herald from Port Elizabeth and the Dispatch from East London. Although the site was meant to be for citizen media it was led by a fairly large group of professional journalists. Citizen journalists who were encouraged to think out of the box and to write articles that you would never find in the mainstream press were paid a nominal amount for contributions. Unfortunately, [reporter.co.za](http://reporter.co.za) did not last very long. After initial success, the owners of the group could not find a workable business model. There have been other efforts in this direction at Stellenbosch University

and an NGO project at [citizenjournalisminafrica.org](http://citizenjournalisminafrica.org). And I am sure there are others, as well.

### African technology, for once, is used all over the world

Now, we are going out of South Africa to have a look at other parts of the continent. Ushahidi.com is a website based in Kenya. It describes its core business as crowd sourcing crises information. According to the website “Ushahidi” – which means “testimony” in Swahili – is a website that was initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election fallout at the beginning of 2008. This is in many ways citizen journalism at its best because many people were contributing relevant information. Soon after the crisis in Kenya, Ushahidi was deployed in South Africa to map incidents of xenophobic violence. Since then it has been used for various reasons in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in India and Pakistan. The television network, Al Jazeera, has even used Ushahidi to map incidents of violence in Gaza.

Perhaps the place where Ushahidi has had the biggest impact has been in Haiti. The profile of Ushahidi was raised significantly when it was one of the main tools used to rescue operations following the earthquake in Haiti. People sent in text messages to 4636 to trace their friends and family. Subsequent to that it has been used in a similar fashion after the earthquake in Chile, and even in collaboration with the Washington Post in Washington D.C. after the winter snow storms. The American subsite was called “Snowmageddon.” What a wonderful name.

It is a wonderful way to conclude my presentation with technology that was developed in Africa and is now being used in crises situations all over the world. Enkosi kakhulu. Thank you very much.

# Is this the beginning of a new participatory journalism? Citizen media at a tipping point

Traditional media have lost their news monopoly. Social media like blogs, Twitter or simply SMS have passed the power to publicize news to citizens with internet access or mobile phones. All of a sudden, everybody can publish stories and be a citizen journalist. In countries without press freedom these citizen journalists can pass the censor and even closed up media stations and provide at least some information and regional news. But citizen journalists are rarely trained. Most of them do not even know about the ethical standards which are important values of traditional media houses. How reliable is information from citizens who are concerned? Can their news be trusted? Is there a chance for professional and citizen journalists to forge an alliance? These were some of the questions the panelists were out to discuss.



## Ritu Kapur

from India is the editorial and executive producer of the Citizen Journalists Show at CNN-IBN, an English-language TV news channel. She oversees all entertainment, health and technology programmes and produces a number of special shows. For the second year in a row, CNN-IBN hosted a citizen journalism award ceremony in February rewarding those reports that aimed to bring change.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** I am Sigrun Rottmann, and I'm going to get going straightaway. Ritu Kapur, let's talk about citizen journalism. You work with citizen journalists. What exactly are you doing?

**Ritu Kapur:** We have a show on CNN-IBN which is called Citizen Journalist Show. It's a weekly half-hour show and we typically have about five or six citizen journalists' stories including pictures and videos that just come in every week. Our traditional camera and our traditional reporter work with the citizen journalist to put together the report. People are just coming to us. They realise that anybody can be a citizen journalist. They are coming to us with very personal issues, but they actually have a resonance on larger issues. So they are making a difference.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** How do people get in touch with you?

**Ritu Kapur:** We have a website and we tell people how to upload their videos or just write to us. In India, access to the internet is still very limited. So people call us, they actually come and visit us at the office and send us letters by snail mail. Or a friend is calling a friend who knows somebody in the office, who then calls us. It is still a lot like that.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Why did you decide to go so big with your CNN-IBN citizen journalism programme?

**Ritu Kapur:** We have actually just gone big, by chance, not by design. We started citizen journalism on the channel when there was a series of blocks on the Mumbai local trains. We decided that there were a lot of people needing help. And there were a lot of cam video guys who wanted to connect with us, so that they could give information to people about safe areas in Mumbai. That is how it started. It was not like a group of people saying, "let's have citizen journalism on the channel." Citizen journalism has got a momentum of its own.

I happened to be the hands-on run down person on the channel that night. We decided to go bigger on that. Soon after that there were floods in Mumbai, they became another reason for using citizen reports, because traditional media obviously could not reach all places. By that time, we had already got a system going. We realised that these kinds of stories had an aim and people had just seen that there was a platform to solve their problems. If they go out and use a microphone and make a lot of noise, they will be able to get accountability on their issue. They'll be able to open doors to authorities, because the authorities are scared of the media and do not want the story to go out. Instead, the authorities want that the outgoing story says: "They sorted the problem out."

**Sigrun Rottmann:** I'd like to move onto another part of the world, to the Middle East, and talk to Daoud Kuttab. The media landscape in the Middle East is far more restricted than in India, not as liberalised by any means. What space is there in the Middle East, in Jordan, in the Palestinian Territories for citizen journalism? Is there an appetite for it?

**Daoud Kuttab:** There is always an appetite for transparency and for knowing what is happening in your own country. In the Middle East media are largely controlled by governments or media business people who are close to the government. The journalists are



## Sigrun Rottmann

works with the BBC World Service radio in London. She is a member of the production team of Newshour, the World Service's flagship news and current affairs programme. Sigrun has previously worked as a newspaper journalist in Germany and Latin America. She is especially interested in the political implications of the internet and how digital media can be harnessed for development, democratisation and conflict transformation.

members of a kind of restrictive union that practices a lot of self-censorship. To act outside of this castle of traditional media is quite difficult. The king of Jordan is open to the internet, he wants Jordan to be a kind of internet hub. In fact, many journalists in Jordan divide the actual cabinet ministers into analogue ministers and digital ministers. In between their internal struggle people like us try to do things using the internet.

When we first started in 2000, there was no private radio allowed. Radio was only run by the government. I attended a conference during which a Jordanian minister was speaking about the internet being free in Jordan. I told him that I wanted to start an internet radio, even though the penetration was small. I used my contacts in the Palestinian Territories and in the West Bank. They downloaded our internet signal and rebroadcasted it back into Jordan. Basically, we were doing something completely illegal in a legal way. In the meantime the Jordan authorities gave us a license. Now we are broadcasting at least in the Amman area and in the Jordan Valley, where we are trying to help some farming women to get their own community radio.

By now we are creating an hour-long programme in Amman and broadcast it on the internet. We have a Jericho radio station in Palestine which actually downloads the internet stream and rebroadcasts it back into the Jordan Valley. We encourage a lot of ordinary people – taxi drivers, university students and high school students – to be involved in the media.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** How do you do that?


**Daoud Kuttab:** We do some training and we give people badges. It is amazing how much a badge with a person's name and picture on it saying "this is a member of a media organisation" gives them power to go into places they usually do not go. Once they read their names on the net or hear their voices on the radio it gives them a lot of encouragement. It is so simple sometimes.

And they succeed. Let me tell you about a civil servant who went to his neighbourhood and filmed one little spot of road that had been left out when ten years ago all roads had been paved. For ten years residents have been complaining that their little spot of road had not been paved. But nothing had happened. The civil servant did a video blog and put it on the net. Then somebody called the mayor and told him about the video, that it was on the internet and that everybody in the world could see his city. The mayor got really worried, and within one month they had paved that road. After ten years of complaint it was a video blog that brought results.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Would you say that the interest of your audience is mainly in local news coverage and that this interest enhances also the interest in citizen journalism?

**Daoud Kuttab:** It is difficult in many of the Arab countries. In most Arab countries the media are completely free on every issue concerning other Arab countries except the country they are in. People who want to read news about Egypt read Algerian newspapers, Syrians read the Saudi newspapers and so on. Since local people do not read their local newspapers there is a huge demand for local news. That's why we started a video blogging project where we train people how to use a camera and how to upload pictures.





# Compassion is not the first concern of the media. They need professional journalists.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Richard, Uganda is a country where there has been a news liberalisation going on in the last few years. Uganda has got a lot of new TV and radio stations as well as independent newspapers. At the same time, Uganda is a country that knows conflicts, especially in the North. What is going on in terms of citizen journalism?

**Richard M. Kavuma:** In my country you have to differentiate. In the capital Kampala and a few of the other larger towns you have people who can use the internet, and they are publishing their own blogs. We had some political trouble in September last year, and many people were turning to the blogs to hear various opinions of what was going on. We have a level of citizen journalism where anyone who has an internet connection can put up his blog. Or the people go to the online newspapers and make their comments heard. I have been involved with the Katine project. The newspaper Guardian which is published in London came out with an idea to follow a development project, a typical aid project to reduce poverty, encourage education and good governance. The Guardian decided to follow this project from its inception in 2007 up to its end in 2010.

As a journalist, I spend half my time in this rural community writing on what the community is thinking about the project, but also trying to get the local community to make their voice heard, to be able to interface with people who are in Berlin, in London and all over the world via the internet. The one thing that came out is that it is a challenge.

When we are in Berlin, we can take the internet for granted. But when you are in a rural African community, you cannot, because people may have never touched a computer or know what the internet is. They want very much to talk to other people in the UK or in the West, so my job has been to bridge the gap and to teach the communities about the internet, introducing them to typing and blogging.

We have been able to get community members to shoot videos, we have trained them with using flip cameras so that they can shoot their own videos about issues that they feel matter to them. Someone took a video about fishing and how the fish has been disappearing



## Richard M. Kavuma

from Uganda has been working in the media for almost 15 years. He currently works as a projects editor at The Observer newspaper in Kampala. Richard also writes for the British Guardian and Observer on the so-called Katine Community Partnerships Project, a three-year development project seeking to improve the lives of the people in Katine, a village north of Kampala. In 2006, Richard produced an analysis of the Millennium Development Goals in Uganda, a series that was awarded by the United Nations. He received the CNN Multichoice African Journalist of the Year Award in 2007.

from the rivers. This video was edited by people at the Guardian in London and afterwards posted on the website. The community journalists were always delighted to see their own content on the world wide web. This says a lot about the potential of citizen journalism in underprivileged communities.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** We hear a lot about the rising use of mobile phones in Africa. Many people have got a mobile phone. What is the deal in Uganda? Do people use mobile phones and do media organisations make use of that?

**Richard M. Kavuma:** Only between five and ten percent of people in Uganda have regular access to the internet. Actually, in the absence of very reliable internet connection the mobile phone has been behind the large explosion of citizen journalism.

We have a radio station both in central Uganda and in the North. Either early in the morning or late in the evening they call up people in their communities, and it is up to those people to tell the news in their community. This, in fact, is an established radio station using content provided exclusively by people in their various communities. Conferred to Germany you might have someone in Munich saying “this is happening here,” then someone in Koblenz and someone in Frankfurt. This is very popular with the listeners.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Werner, is the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung involved in citizen journalism?

**Werner D'Inka:** Not at all.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Why not?

**Werner D'Inka:** I suppose, I am the one to pour some water into the sweet wine of citizen journalism. Let me start with a question to Solana: Solana, you told at the end of your speech that journalists are citizens, too. Architects are citizens, too, but would we feel comfortable if we knew that our houses had been built by citizen architects?

**Solana Larsen:** Maybe it is easier than I'd suspect.

**Werner D'Inka:** I doubt it. In my opinion, journalism is far more than just telling stories. You also mentioned that, for some of your contributors, citizen journalism is a kind of self expression. In my opinion, self expression is closer to literature than to journalism. Telling interesting, nice stories is exciting – at Hyde Park corner, for example, or in the pub. But journalism, professional journalism, is much more than just telling stories. It is about checking facts, it is about distinguishing between private concerns, individual concerns on the one hand and public affairs on the other. I studied journalism at the university for five years. Has this been a waste of time if I can be a citizen journalist after just a few weeks of training?

**Sigrun Rottmann:** There are projects of citizen journalism in Germany, especially on the web, but there is also some citizen television going on. Have you had a look at these projects, maybe even made a critical evaluation and said, “This is just not for us. We are not going to get involved in this?”



Internet publicity gives people a lot of encouragement. All of a sudden they are not only news receivers and people concerned by politics and events. They are getting involved in the media and in the society as such.

**Werner D'Inka:** A colleague of mine and I have a talk show on a local TV station in Frankfurt. It is an interesting thing because television is new for us. But citizen journalism is not made by professional journalists. There is a lot of compassion, but compassion is not our first concern. Professionalism is. Although I must admit that in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia with its regional newspapers' monopoly there are some new public spheres where journalists as bloggers cover subjects that these monopoly newspapers do not take notice of.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Are these not professional journalists?

**Werner D'Inka:** These are professional journalists, as far as I can see.

**Daoud Kuttub:** Do you have sports journalists in your paper? And are they objective? To go on: Do you think laws are important and, if so, that lawyers should write the law? Should parliament be made of lawyers only? The fact is that in parliament the representatives of the people are not just lawyers. So you cannot say "only lawyers should be in the parliament" the way you say "only architects should build houses." The same argument can be turned around. Because journalism affects the whole population, and so different people like citizen journalists can be part of the media. They are not the only ones, they work with professional media, but they are part of the big structure of the media.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Let's move on for the time being. I think we are going to come back to this later. Let's talk to Saqib Riaz. Saqib, you are what we call a media observer in Pakistan, a country where there has been a huge liberalisation of the media. However, the openness of media is limited. There is censorship. And there is self-censorship. But there is also citizen journalism online and on television. What subjects do people want to be dealt with? What issues do they come forward with?



## Saqib Riaz

from Pakistan is Assistant Professor at the Department of Mass Communication at the Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad where he lectures and studies the media business in all its facets. Saqib had formerly worked as active journalist at various media houses in Pakistan. At university he recently started a project with a group of students studying the public opinion about the role of citizen journalism in Pakistan.

**Saqib Riaz:** Citizen journalism is in the beginning stage in Pakistan. Until 2002, there was only one state-owned Pakistan television channel. By now we have 83 private television channels licensed by the government, although some of them are not working. But those which are working encourage citizen journalism. It is the same with radio. Until 2002, there was only the state-owned Radio Pakistan. Now we have 124 private radio stations, we have hundreds of newspapers which meet international standards, in English as well as in Urdu. The problem is that all media are working under strict control of the government. But private TV channels are encouraging citizen journalism reports. Some TV channels require that the citizen journalists identify themselves if they send reports via email. This delays the process for several days. There are certain other TV channels which accept the CJ-reports, screening a disclaimer saying “this TV journalist is not responsible for the facts of the CJ-report.” The most popular television channel in the country, GO-TV, has a programme which is called “GO Dost,” meaning “friends of GO.” They require the citizen journalists to send their reports to their local bureaus. The local bureau journalists verify the facts of the report and, after verification, send the CJ-report to their central office, after which it is displayed on the television channel.

Although citizen journalism is in its initial stage in the country, it is already playing a big role in promoting and conveying the problems of the society to the government. It has played a great role in combating terrorism, because the country has been badly affected by a wave of terrorism. Moreover, citizen journalism is playing a very important role in fighting corruption. But the most important area is the range of social problems of common people, including the energy crisis, the food crisis, air pollution, water pollution or contamination of drinking water. There are the pathetic conditions of roads, unemployment, inflation, and so on and so forth. Citizen journalists are conveying these issues and highlighting them. They are playing a big role.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** You mentioned terrorism as one of the issues that have been tackled. How does it work?

**Saqib Riaz:** It is a very difficult job for citizen journalists to cover the stories about terrorism, because the person who is making a video with his mobile phone is putting his own life into danger. But television channels receive reports and movies made by citizen journalists including pictures of bomb blasts, after effects and so on. Last year the Sri Lankan cricket team was attacked. Some citizen journalists made a video of the attack and send it to a TV channel which broadcasted it.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Would you say that the greater part of the material that is being sent in is used by Pakistani media? And what material is being sent in? Pictures, photos and videos? Am I right that it is not so much stories that are being produced?

**Saqib Riaz:** Yes. One reason might be that newspapers and most of the television channels prefer the stories of their own reporters and not the citizens' because of credibility problems. However, they accept some unusual pictures and reports of other events sent by the citizens.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Let's move on to Rezwanul who is a regional editor for Global Voices, which we have heard a lot about from Solana. He's also involved in the Rising Voices

# Local language blogs must be translated to reach international audiences.

project. Rezwanul, you are not a trained journalist. What are you by profession, originally?

**Rezwanul Islam:** I am an accountant.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Would you describe yourself as a citizen journalist?

**Rezwanul Islam:** Yes, I am a citizen journalist and I did not receive any formal training. It all started in 2003, when I read about Salam Pax, a very active blogger, in our local newspaper. He influenced me a lot. So I decided to try it out and started blogging. Soon I had found my focus, because Bangladesh is not so well represented in the international mainstream media. You only read bad news, about floods and political unrest. People barely know the other parts. That is what was pinching me. That is why I named my blog the Third World View.

I started looking for other Bangladeshi voices and published a list of Bangladeshi bloggers. In 2005, I started contributing to Global Voices. It really is important to translate the local language blog contents for international readers. Nobody knows Bangla, so how could anyone learn about what the Bangladeshi bloggers were saying. People actually express themselves in their mother tongue best. Only 30 to 35 per cent of the internet is in English, the rest is in other languages. At

Global Voices the bloggers translate the contents from the local blogosphere to Arabic or Chinese or to other languages.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** How important is citizen journalism? Should it play a role, can it play a role? Do you, as a citizen journalist, add to mainstream journalism?

**Rezwanul Islam:** A local businessman in Bangladesh has built a building which he called the Taj Mahal of India. There was a story in the local newspaper about that replica of Taj Mahal. AFP picked up the news. You can imagine what happened when the Indian authorities heard about it. The fake Taj Mahal almost caused a diplomatic problem between the two countries. Until some Bangla bloggers recorded a video and proofed that the Bangladesh Taj Mahal was just a tourist trap which only from some distance looked like the real Taj Mahal. AFP had missed that, but the bloggers picked it up. Global Voices reported about the bloggers' video, so soon everybody knew. Nevertheless, a citizen journalist would be more successful if he worked with mainstream media. The problem of mainstream media is that they cannot send a reporter everywhere. Citizen journalists are everywhere. They can break a story, and mainstream media can carry on with it, professionally. Both are vital in our context. You cannot exclude any of them.

**A woman from the audience:** Solana, Werner D'Inka said that citizen journalism is maybe more like literature. To me, it is more like PR, because most citizen journalists have a certain cause they are fighting for. That means that they are not objective. Don't you think that the role of citizen journalists is more like the role of strategic communication?

**Solana Larsen:** It would be a dangerous thing to generalise what all citizen journalists do or do not do. A blog does not automatically make you behave in a certain way. It is a tool that you use to meet many different ends. Sure, some people use it for PR, some people use it for political causes, but there are many, many different uses. Speaking of literature, there are many people who use their blogs for literary purposes or to exchange poetry, in Africa or Iran or elsewhere. You should not generalise and assume that all journalists are good. Likewise, there are many good and many bad bloggers. And there are many positive or negative uses of citizen media.

**Werner D'Inka:** What I meant actually is that there is a strict border between literature and journalism. Literature deals with fiction, and journalists should deal with facts. That's the difference. Just to give you another example what at least might happen when the filter of professional journalism disappears: One year ago we had elections in the State of Hesse. Several newspapers and TV stations got anonymous information about one minister who was accused of sexual abuse of children. The newspapers refused to publish it. They did not trust the information. But it was immediately all over the internet. Some bloggers were even invited to call newspapers and to ask them why the traditional media suppressed what they said to be the truth. This is just an example what might happen if we confuse the spheres of professional journalism and other kinds of publishing.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** That is very much one of the questions that we are going to discuss later about the necessity for training for citizen journalists and ethical standards.

**Werner D'Inka:** But once a citizen journalist is trained, is he still a citizen journalist or is he a professional journalist?

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Before we can discuss this there were other questions in the audience. There is something on the Twitter wall: The question is raised if professional journalism might be defined as some kind of life boat in the information flood we have. Perhaps Richard would like to answer this. I suppose in Africa as well as in other parts of the world professional journalists often filter citizen journalism. Richard, do you see a lot of professional influence on citizen journalism?

**Richard M. Kavuma:** That's true where you have collaborations between citizen journalists and professional media, when citizens for instance call a radio station to tell their story. There I think it is a bit mediated. But, of course, you have citizen journalists as well who just have an internet connection and who write their own blogs, raising issues of their own. Of course, credible media like the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung will have to check everything. They have to make sure that whatever they put out has been fact-checked and is fit to print. But the public has different standards. People may read a personal blog of someone from Kampala and they will find it biased, they will find it some kind of PR. But I think they will understand and take that blog as what it is. But if the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung or the Observer did a non-balanced story, people would be enraged and the newspaper's credibility would decline. So I think the public is developing two standards: one for the citizen journalists and one for the mainstream media.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** This requires, however, that people are able to distinguish between the two of them. They need media competence. Rezwani, you are a blogger. What do you think about credibility, and how do you make sure that people are always understanding what they are reading?

**Rezwaniul Islam:** Professional journalism is needed to provide news creatively and professionally. But citizen journalism is more than that. I can show you examples of societies like India and Pakistan. There is a

large scale of middle class people who are ignorant about what is happening around them. Or they just neglect. They do not react to their neighbours who might be in deep trouble. But via social media, via Facebook and Twitter, people have the means to tell that somebody is requiring help – and then somebody reacts. Citizen journalists just express themselves. If we consider democracy, if we consider peoples' opinion to be important, then this is important for everybody. Social media and citizen journalism is empowering people to participate.

**Ritu Kapur:** We also are very happy that people are using the platform to push their own cause, because that way they discover that their cause has an echo in several people. There has been a huge sense of under-confidence within the people that their problems do not matter. And they felt that there was not much point in saying anything, that nothing was going to change. Now that has changed. People are becoming more confident, and they are using the media. Nevertheless, it is very important that we have people monitoring and counterchecking citizen media reports.

**Richard M. Kavuma:** What Ritu said about people pushing their own issues forces us to return to the basics of what journalism was supposed to be. Who is supposed to be the voice of the voiceless? Along the way we moved from listening to people's issues to forming the opinion of what is important to people. In a way, citizen journalism is taking us back to the basics. If we cannot be the voice of the voiceless, we miss the wider issues which are emanating from single stories.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Richard, are you implying that mainstream media have been lacking to cover a lot of issues? And that therefore citizen journalism is an absolute necessity?

**Richard M. Kavuma:** Yes, I think so. Citizen journalism lets us know about issues that are very important to the people. If we know them we can try to include the people more.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** What's your faith on this, Daoud?

**Daoud Kuttab:** Let me tell you a story: There is a big problem of police brutality in Egypt. The police beat up people, and so far many people have died under torture. But never has any policeman been tried or imprisoned for police brutality. A few years ago, some of the policemen used their cell phones to film each other torturing a person, and they exchanged this message as a joke. This video finally got to a blogger. He put it on his blog. For the first time in the history of Egypt a policeman was actually convicted and put in prison because there was documentation. You cannot document police brutality with the best journalists, because they do not have access. But people have, especially in repressed societies, and especially in areas and to issues that are not accessible to professional journalists. You do not want a complicated analysis from a citizen journalist. But you want him to film something, to take a picture, to report on something that he actually was an eyewitness to. If he, furthermore, had some basic training and knows not to depend on rumours, I think there is a lot of success.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** We have heard a lot of positive examples of citizen journalism, but there was a question earlier about the possible use of citizen journalism for certain political or



## Werner D'Inka

is member of the board of editors-in-chief of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. He is also honorary director of the Free Russian German Institute for Journalism at the University in Rostov-on-the-Don in South Russia and reads lectures at various German universities. D'Inka has been lecturing at IJ training courses for a couple of years sharing his experience in media ethics and media management with journalists from all over the world.



## Daoud Kuttab

is a Palestinian journalist, living and working in Jordan. He is the founder and director of AmmanNet, the first internet-based radio station in the Arab world. In 1996, he founded the Institute of Modern Media at Al Quds University in Ramallah where he has just recently stopped lecturing. From 2007 till 2008 Daoud taught a seminar on new media in the Arab world at Princeton University. He has won numerous international awards, including the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists. He is on the International Press Institute's list of 50 Press Freedom Heroes.

commercial agendas, for PR. In a region like the Middle East, where there is a lot of political polarisation, do you see the danger that citizen journalism can be used by interested parties to push their own agenda, Daoud?

**Daoud Kuttab:** Absolutely. In Jordan, for example, we have two really big problems regarding not just citizen journalism but the use of the internet. One problem is that there are a lot of hate discussions. Once there is a story, the discussion about it becomes very polarising and hateful. This is due to the anonymity of the web. Sometimes intelligence services are involved in funding this or that group who fabricate things.

Then we have another problem which we call "blackmailing." There are a lot of sites which publish invented stories about persons. The anonymous authors say: "Look, we can make this story disappear. Just put an ad or contribute to us." This is a new kind of blackmail. We cannot deny that there is a lot of abuse, but you have that in print and radio media, as well. The problem exists because of this sudden flow of information, because of the whole information revolution. Repressed countries all of a sudden have the ability that anybody can create a website and can put all kinds of rumours on it. Different parties do get involved and you cannot expect a lot of self-regulation in such a situation. But I think that people do figure out who is credible, who is a big liar, who has an agenda.

And they know who is credible: If people really want to know facts, they go to the more traditional media, even if it is online, because they trust that. Though in societies in transition trust and fraud is a real problem.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** I would like to come back to the potentials of citizen journalism. Rezwani, we all have heard the opinion that citizen journalism can contribute to the growth of a civic spirit or an idea of citizenship and therefore also help democratisation. Do you think that this is an essential part of citizen journalism, that this should be the aim for you?

**Rezwani Islam:** Citizen journalism has a wider context. Social media is part of that. People are finding Twitter a way to express themselves in 140 characters. They do not have to write a big blog, they can update from everywhere. Social media like Twitter are a connection between people, they help to spread the word. Ten or twenty years ago we only knew what journalists told us via newspaper or other media. But now we have easy access to the information flow. I do not think that genocide as it happened in Rwanda could happen nowadays without people knowing and not doing anything. Today a cell phone can spread the story to the world community. This is the power of the citizen journalist.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Werner, could citizen journalism possibly contribute to the civic spirit in Germany.

**Werner D'Inka:** Maybe. But maybe the citizens' participation is overestimated. I give you an example which is fairly important because it is related to money. Some cities in Germany, like Wiesbaden, had the idea to let the citizens participate in setting the municipal budget. What do you think how many people in Wiesbaden took part in this process? It was 1.2 percent of the population who were interested in how the city would spend their tax money. There are two possible interpretations for that. Version one: People in Ger-





Of course, a media conference needs coverage. It were amongst others the participants of an IJ multimedia journalism training course who reported on the keynotes and the discussion.

many are not so interested in what is going on in their community. Version two: They are quite satisfied with the representative parliamentary system.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Perhaps your scepticism is founded on the fact that you operate in a developed country with a liberal press, with press freedom and with a certain amount of satisfaction amongst the population, while everybody else on the panel is coming from societies which are in some kind of transformation. Do you think that has got something to do with it?

**Werner D'Inka:** Yes, I think so. It is the same with public referenda. Just remember when the Swiss were asked to vote on the minarets. The majority of the Swiss population said “no” to minarets. So to me, for crucial decisions a parliamentary system with representatives that we have elected is not the worst version. And I do hope that Europeans are and stay satisfied with the job we, the journalists, do with the professional, the traditional media.

**Richard M. Kavuma:** I want to add an example to that. On Monday this week, the leading newspapers in Kampala all had the same editorial which was titled “Government must not kill the free press!” All leading newspapers had that, including the government newspaper which, naturally, changed the title a little bit to “Government must promote free press!” The content, nevertheless, was the same – for the first time ever. Why so? Because the government introduced a bill to increase the control over the free press. Under this bill the government could very easily say that a certain newspaper endangers the national security. Then the government could cancel the newspaper’s license. And if a newspaper does not have values which the government approves of the newspaper might not be given a license. When you are operating in an environment like this, where the newspapers are always under the threat of being closed by the government, where the radio stations can be closed by the Head of the Broadcasting Council, then the internet becomes a very use-

# Citizen journalists have to listen to the same ethic demands as professional journalists.

ful tool of mobilisation, a very useful tool of increasing the social voices that are working in the political space, because the actual spaces of engagement in politics become very, very limited.

Governments that are promoting censorship have to become more and more sophisticated. Fortunately, in a country like Uganda the sophistication is not yet that much. When there is a crisis, the use of Facebook and the use of SMS and mobile phones become very important. In a way citizen media for me might be more useful or might be more urgent in societies where the political space is narrowed and where the press is not as free as in a Western democracy like Germany.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Are citizen media a tool of change?

**Richard M. Kavuma:** They are a tool of mobilisation, because when people start exchanging messages and images they get more and more engaged. Maybe people are not very interested in setting the budget in a German city, because they know that the parliament is doing a decent job. Or it might be an issue that is not critical to them. But if something happens which is of greater importance to the people then you can see from their reaction that people are very interested.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Saqib, you believe that citizen journalism can contribute to conflict transformation. Now, the relationship between India and Pakistan is quite

tense most of the time. Do you think that citizen journalists can contribute to peace building?

**Saqib Riaz:** Yes, of course, citizen journalism can play a vital role in promoting peace and harmony. Mainstream journalism in our country usually follows the official line of the government, while citizen journalists are not bound to do so. As we can see in a lot of reports by citizens and even in some articles in the newspapers, most people in Pakistan and India want to live in peace and harmony and finish the “cold war” between their countries. Citizen journalists are citizens, and if citizens want to end the enmity then citizen journalism can play an important role in bringing the two countries closer to each other.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** So the mainstream media in Pakistan paint India as the eternal enemy, whereas citizen journalists or bloggers might be prepared to see Indians as fellow human beings and look behind the rhetoric?

**Saqib Riaz:** Yes.

**Ritu Kapur:** Actually, I think visual media is to blame. Stories about Pakistan are always stories about Taliban, about the beheading of somebody or a woman being stoned to death because of adultery. Traditional journalists tend to be caught in their own trap after a while, which is why citizen journalism is important.

If we can get citizen journalists' stories from Pakistan about a different Pakistan, about other issues, about smaller issues and the huge part of the society which is not being represented, then citizen journalists make the difference.

**Woman in the audience:** What exactly is the difference between a non-government organisation which has a cause and a citizen journalist who has a cause? Both are campaigning, both are putting out reports and stories.

**Richard M. Kavuma:** I think all information that is published within a newspaper or on the internet will be judged on its merit. If I work for a non-government organisation and I write a blog and speak about the way children in my district are not looked after by the government, the way mothers cannot deliver safely, because the government has neglected their local health centre ... If I do that as a citizen journalist, it is the same information that an NGO working in the area would also put out. Both sources serve the public good. If another citizen journalist knows about a road which was supposed to be repaired by the government five years ago but has not been repaired, and this citizen journalist takes a picture of the bad road and puts it online and raises a campaign around it, that is as legitimate.

**Rezwanul Islam:** Actually, I think that social media is also being exploited by commercial organisations. I know one of our bloggers who has started a venture in India which deals with the question how to use social media for corporate plans, how to promote brands via blogs and social media. There is a thin line, though bloggers' ethics are already developing.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Are citizen journalists serving a purpose? Are they a force, for example, for peace building?

**Werner D'Inka:** We journalists are professional observers; it is not our duty to promote purposes, even not noble purposes. It is not our duty to promote peace or welfare of the nations.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Daoud, what do you think?

**Daoud Kuttab:** I do not think they actually help in peace building, but I think they help in humanisation. The traditional media do dehumanise, because they stereotype. In the Palestinian conflict, for example, we as Palestinians are caught in between two kinds of competing forces: Some people think of all Palestinians as kind of blood-thirsty terrorists. On the other hand some people show Palestinians as heroes who never go wrong. Both are stereotypical extremes that are made because the media are using the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for different reasons. We need to humanise the conflict and show real people with different desires.

But I do not agree about the idea that media can by itself create peace or not create peace. Neither traditional media nor citizen media. Journalists should always stay alert. You know if Israeli and Palestinian officials meet each other, they tend to exaggerate how they actually like each other. They are happy and they are hugging and embracing each other. But in fact that is not the case. Journalists have to tell the truth. They have to take a look



## Rezwanul Islam

from Bangladesh is currently living in Indonesia. Rezwan has been the Global Voices' regional editor for South Asia since 2008. Before that he worked as a feature editor for Rising Voices, a development project of Global Voices. He still follows and monitors different citizen media outreach projects of Rising Voices. At present, he is in charge of the Bangla page of Global Voices.

behind the scene, even if the truth is not as good as what the officials wanted to show. I badly want peace. But I think we have to be careful not to exaggerate peace over truth.

So it is important not to generalise. Everything has its place. Citizen media have their place, peace media have their place. But if you expect citizen media to represent all media, you have got a problem. Citizens can provide very good crowd sourcing, they can provide you some really important eyewitness reports, and they can be influential at times in giving some new perspectives to a big story. But citizen media can not replace existing media.

**Woman in the audience:** How do citizen journalists make sure that they reach out to their target groups? How do they get their audience to listen?

**Daoud Kuttab:** People like to hear stories, and they like to hear stories not just told by journalists but by people. It is always the person who is an expert on his own life. If you want to hear about how life is for handicapped people, you need a handicapped person to tell you, not a journalist who might not be handicapped. If you want to hear about different communities or ethnic groups, the people who represent them are quite passionate about it. Traditional journalists sometimes are very dry. They are fact-based, but with the facts they sometimes lose the liveliness in their stories. Citizen journalists have a rough edge about them. They are natural. They have passion. Passion can be an advantage. It is attractive, it is fresh. We traditional media journalists have become so stale because we do the same stories every day. We have a particular routine of how to write a story that we miss the holistic approach to what media are about. It is the freshness that attracts the audience.

**Man in the audience:** There are thousands of citizen journalists. Shouldn't we professional journalists be very open to their stories in a way that we try to establish a kind of guide to channel all this information and to check it so that the user could really find what is important to him and what is not?

**Rezwanul Islam:** Actually, bloggers can be found via any search engine. If you google me or my blog or just

Bangladesh there is high chance that you find my blog on specialized topics. Furthermore, there are already people, bloggers, compiling the blogosphere. They categorise the information and put links to relevant stories. That means you do not have to search through hundreds of blogs to find out what you want. You want sports? You find it because it is categorised.

**Werner D'Inka:** Professional journalists must recheck information, and if the information is false it is not worth being published. But if we check it and prove it as right then it is journalism. We always come back to the contradictions of the term "citizen journalism."

**Man in the audience:** I am from Afghanistan. Journalism in Afghanistan is quite different from other countries. Does citizen journalism work in Afghanistan? I doubt so. Last year in the North of Afghanistan somebody notified a regional radio station about a case of child abuse. The radio station brought the story, but what happened was that the person who notified the station was threatened. Now he cannot walk around his village because he is afraid for his life.

**Saqib Riaz:** Actually, I really think that it depends upon the situation in the countries whether citizen journalism is working or not. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, for instance, the media are working under difficult conditions. They are controlled by the governments and they are not free to disseminate information which they receive from the citizens. If they broadcast against the will of the government, their transmissions can be suspended. Even then, citizens can play an important role. They can create good stories and they can find suitable media to publish them. With Afghanistan the problem is that there are no private media organisations. Even if there are, they have to work under the control of the government. Meaning, they are not able to transmit or broadcast any news story against the government policies.

**Rezwanul Islam:** But there are tools for bloggers to be anonymous, you can find some of them on the Global Voices advocacy site. If bloggers can be anonymous and hide their names, they can still publish stories.



The impact that citizen journalists have on their societies depends on the country they are in. The panellists agreed that citizen journalist are needed more in societies lacking press freedom. But even in functioning democracies the voice of the people can add to the coverage by the mainstream media.

**Saqib Riaz:** But you need literate people. You need to have internet connections and computers. In Pakistan almost half of the population is illiterate. Only ten percent have access to the internet. It is even less in rural areas.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Solana, obviously you want to comment on this.

**Solana Larsen:** Yes. Even if internet access is very low, citizen journalists are still needed, especially in countries which do not allow you to be a citizen journalists. Tibetans, for example, do not even have a country. But last year during the uprisings, there actually were citizen journalist' reports from out of Tibet. The Tibetans may not be able to publish in their own country. But they can still sent stories out for the world to know.

**Man in the audience:** Must we be worried about the fact that other people than established journalists can be setting the agenda? We are in a situation where millions of people virtually can grab a microphone and publish an article on the internet, and there is no regular framework so far. A lot of us are concerned because we are used to a certain structure, and we like to know who operates the system. But now we are in a situation with a system that does operate, but we just do not understand exactly by whom. We cannot tell which story gets the public attention. We heard examples of people in local situations who decided to fight for their rights. Because of the internet, which the local authorities feared, they succeeded. But what is the extent of that power? What kind of stories do get the attention? Are local people getting more political power through the internet?

**Daoud Kuttub:** I think it has been the traditional media that have set the wrong agenda in the last few years. Think about the US media which had to admit that it was a mistake to support the war with Iraq and Afghanistan. The alternative media had been

against the war right from the beginning. If we had left it just to the traditional media, there would have been some terrible mistakes. It is a very democratic thing to let people choose which kind of media they want to trust. What citizen journalists should do is to fetch new energy. They should try to shape the agenda and integrate with the existing media. The mistake is that citizen media often think of themselves as the alternative. Instead, it would be clever to try and work with traditional media to add value to them.

That brings us to training. Citizen journalists in my opinion need training. There are some basic things that all citizen journalists need to know. They need to know the basic ethics that you cannot depend on rumours, you cannot create fact. That you have to tell the truth, that is crucial. They need to be coached when it comes to complex issues. Of course, with training, some citizen journalists become professional journalists, but some just stay what they are. As doctors or as taxi drivers they can contribute to the public domain.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Ritu, what is your opinion on this? Is the professional journalist the safeguard of ethics in citizen journalism?

**Ritu Kapur:** I think that is required. This kind of mediating or filtering is required. The internet, blogs and Twitter can be misused; maybe to get back at somebody or to spread misinformation. Checking and filtering will always be important. Even with citizen journalists getting trained this requirement won't ever go away.

**Rezwanul Islam:** I think you need to stick to facts. But citizen media, especially blogs, are really interactive. They have comments. Bloggers cannot get away publishing something which is not right because people comment. As a citizen journalist you want to build credibility for yourself, you need to be trusted.

**Saqib Riaz:** A code of ethics is very important for citizen journalism. There should be some code of ethics that, for example, the citizen journalist's report must be based on facts, and the facts must be verified. It should be unbiased, it should be balanced, there should be use of decent language, because some

reports really lack it. These are issues which need to be tackled.

**Richard M. Kavuma:** Ethics are needed in citizen journalism as well as in traditional journalism. We all know professional journalists who take bribes to kill stories. Even professional journalist must be trained to respect the ethics. They have to listen to the same demands as citizen journalists.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Werner D'Inka, my last question to you. If we meet again in ten years time, will citizen journalism still be there? Will it have been a fashion? Or will it have turned out as something important in the media?

**Werner D'Inka:** In the countries my panel colleagues are from this kind of journalism plays an important role. But I think it is a transition period. Journalistic quality will be the key for the future, at least for the print media. It's the only asset we have. Otherwise newspapers will not survive. Agenda setting belongs to quality. We do set the agenda because our readers want us to. Though we are not the only source of agenda setting. On the local level people talk to their neighbours, they talk at the work place, at the university, in the busses. We are not the only source of influence.

**Sigrun Rottmann:** Time is up. It has been a fascinating discussion, and we have seen some of the potential of citizen journalism. We have seen its positive potential as well as its weaknesses and downfalls. What has become very clear is that we are in the middle of a discussion about citizen journalism. It seems to be part of the big question as how the media landscape is going to develop in the next few years and what kind of relationship the media are going to develop with their audiences. I am sure we all will come back to these questions. For now, thank you very much for your attention.

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