MISA Zimbabwe@25: Reflections on media law reforms

BY CRIS CHINAKA

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has produced this special publication to commemorate 25 years of sterling work by its Zimbabwe chapter in helping to promote access to information, in defending press freedom and developing a pluralistic media environment to serve the needs of the public in the region.

While there is still much to do to advance this work, the commendable contribution by the MISA Zimbabwe family in advancing the interests of the larger public deserves to be celebrated.

This work has included the establishment of a flourishing network of active provincial membership structures to assist in protecting the media space, lobby against restrictive laws, upgrade skills and in growing the industry.

It has been a case of collective effort by many people, from the struggles of the founders of the regional body and successive office holders in national chapters, to the solidarity secured from a wide range of structures across professional, community, social, economic and political sectors.

A quarter of a century after the establishment of MISA Zimbabwe, the media world has changed in many respects, and it continues to change.

MISA Zimbabwe, as a national chapter and as a member of the regional collective, needs to continue playing the role that it has been critically fulfilling over the years: offering strong thought and inspiring leadership in the implementation of impactful and practical programmes in the information and media sphere.

Other chapters in southern Africa have acknowledged this key contribution by electing the MISA Zimbabwe National Governing Council (NGC) chairperson, Golden Maunganidze, and national director, Tabani Moyo, as chairperson MISA Regional Governing Council and director respectively, of MISA Regional, respectively.

This leadership responsibility means there is a need to take stock of the past and the present, and to look ahead to the challenges of the future.

This also means an ability to mobilise resources and skills to tackle these challenges, define and secure the complementary supporting roles that the state, the general public, the media, civil society, commerce and industry and other social forces, need to play in countering damaging trends threatening the information and media ecosystem, and working for a better system.

Besides the usual dark cloud that politics and monopolies cast on the media and information environment, the stratospheric rise in misinformation and disinformation, the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic and the uncertainty arising from climate change, have compounded the crisis the world is facing.

This includes Zimbabwe and the Southern African region in which MISA is working.

While we are rightly celebrating yesterday’s achievements, our major focus today should be on tomorrow.

The cause is simple and straightforward: to work for a media and information ecosystem that serves the greater public interest.

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MISA Zimbabwe@25: the milestones

BY GOLDEN MAUNGANIDZE

Introduction

Our lived reality today in which Zimbabwe now has private commercial radio stations and licensed television stations and community radio stations, was 25 years ago deemed inconceivable, if not utopian and risky.

These milestones and notable achievements are grounded through the vision of the men and women who launched the regional Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Regional) in 1992 to promote free, independent, diverse and pluralistic media as envisaged in the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting Free and Independent Media.

The cascading effect of their vision and foresight gave birth to MISA Zimbabwe as we know it today as one of the regional chapters of the MISA Regional outfit, 25 years ago.

Today, MISA Zimbabwe has grown to being the lead media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information organisation whose footprints and achievements are easily traceable and historically recorded accordingly.

Milestones

Constitutional provisions on media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information

- MISA Zimbabwe was the lead organisation in pushing for explicit constitutional provisions on freedom of expression, media freedom and citizens right to access to information

- Through its incessant lobby and advocacy work in that regard, Zimbabwe’s 2013 Constitution, for the first time since its replacement of the independence Lancaster House Constitution, now explicitly provides for the inclusion of sections 61 and 62 of the Constitution.

Golden Maunganidze

Dismantling of AIPPA

The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), enacted in 2002, had been used to harass, arrest, detain journalists and media workers as well as the closure of newspapers such as The Standard and The Zimbabwean.

Following the closures, MISA Zimbabwe launched the Bring Back the Daily News campaign as part of the spirited campaigns for the repealing of AIPPA as a draconian law that impinged on media freedom, freedom of expression, and ultimately, citizens right to access information through a free, independent and diverse media.

These advocacy and lobby campaigns, culminated in the dismantling of AIPPA, and enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in July 2020, to give effect and enforce the enjoyment of citizens right to access to information as provided by Section 62 of the Constitution.

MISA Zimbabwe Board of Trustees chairperson Cris Chinaka
In the historic month of August, 25 years ago, a great milestone was birthed in Zimbabwe. The Media and Information Support Council of Zimbabwe (MISA) Zimbabwe was launched. It is therefore a humbling and gratifying experience for me at the helm of this institution of great significance, to look back and sequentially and exceptionally shaped the regulatory environment, mediaprofessionals, access to information and safety and security of the media both in Zimbabwe and without.

In commemoration of this strategic milestone, MISA Zimbabwe re-affirms its commitment to retain the mantle as it seeks to break new higher ground in tackling the challenges of the future. The organisation is now a constructively and of great importance in these complex times of the COVID-19 pandemic that has disrupted the facets of life that we take for granted.

Looking at the journey of the past 25 years, I’m glad to affirm that MISA Zimbabwe has survived, emerged as a market leader and actually turned a corner, turning a multiplicity of challenges into opportunities.

In recognition of the role played by the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), awarded MISA Zimbabwe with special recognition as a strategic friend of the media and social development in 2008. This was in recognition of the splendid work done by the organization in assisting the union with the setting up of its secretariat.

Further, the organisation has been instrumental in the leadership development for the industry through grooming the young leaders of tomorrow.

The impact of MISA Zimbabwe has not been limited and protected by virtue of the council's legal and freedom of expression and access to information in the Constitution through Sections 57, 61 and 62 respectively.

It contributed to the solution of the challenges impacting on human kind, has been acknowledged as it is now part of the governing boards of the Southern Africa Internet Governance Forum (SAIFG); IFEX, a global network of more than 100 organisations defending freedom of expression, and the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD).

As the brand MISA casts its mantle as it seeks to break new development (GFMD).

As the brand MISA casts its mantle as it seeks to break new ground in the broadcasting industry having run the Free Airways Campaign for almost two decades challenging the broadcasting monopoly.

Built on a strong infrastructure in information movement in Zimbabwe which brings together stakeholders to hold the government accountable.

Hosting the regional secretariat, thereby influencing the growth and expression in the region and beyond, among others.

As the brand MISA casts its eyes far into the future, 10 years ahead, it so does with the aim to address the complexities born of the ever-changing contexts in the realm of policy, media economics, expression online and offline, media freedom, safety and security of the media and media, media, and capture others.

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25 years in defence of effective press freedom

BY GEOFFREY NYAROTA

A FORERUNNER of the famous Windhoek Declaration was a total media seminar held on the banks of the Chobe River in northern Botswana in April 1989.

This gathering brought together journalists representing the southern African region’s then fledgling independent press, to rally together to formulate a strategy which culminated in the landmark Windhoek Declaration.

On 29 April, 1991, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), convened a seminar in the Namibian capital, Windhoek, at which Kabweza and I joined fellow African journalists in discussing the principles of protecting the independence of the press from interference by politicians, on the one hand, and economic interests, on the other.

The outcome of the deliberations was the signing of the Windhoek Declaration on 3 May and the formation, subsequently, of the regional Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

The declaration issued by the African journalists set out the principles committed to a free press, free access to information and media diversity and pluralism. In their resolutions, participants enjoined African governments to provide constitutional guarantees to freedom of the press and association.

MISA was officially launched in September 1992 to focus primarily on the need to promote free, independent and pluralistic media, as envisaged in the declaration.

Among the leading journalists who spearheaded the formation of MISA were Fernando Goncalves of Angola, Methaetaile Leplige of Botswana, Alaudin Osman of Malawi, Fernando Lima of Mozambique, Govin Reddy from South Africa, Gwen Lister of Namibia, Ndimara Tegembega of Tanzania, Fred M’wembe of Zambia, as well as Kabweza and myself, representing Zimbabwe.

Our goal was to fight for genuine press freedom and media diversity in our respective countries. In the course, new privately owned newspapers were launched, while existing ones were reinforced.

They included Leplige’s Mtngezi in Botswana, The Nation in Malawi, Mediacop in Mozambique and Lister’s The Nation in Windhoek. In Zambia, M’membe launched The Post, while in Harare, we established The Daily News, of which I became the founding editor-in-chief.

A total of 11 chapters were established in the SADC member states through which MISA operated at national level. While new newspapers took root or existing ones strengthened, the newly established national chapters lobbied for greater press freedom. There have since been crucial changes on the regional media landscape over the past 30 years.

In Zimbabwe the local chapter has, since its formation in 1996, been active in advocacy work, while pushing for constitutional reforms. MISA Zimbabwe has positioned itself as an important player in the struggle to enhance the free flow of information in both the print and broadcast industries.

It has challenged draconian legislation and scored a major success through the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act in 2003. This replaced the reprehensible Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). While MISA Zimbabwe has done a commendable job in lobbying for press freedom, advances in media technology have contributed to that development. A major contribution has been the advent of the internet and social media.

While in 1991 the major media outlets were limited to print and electronic, today’s government is hard put to exercise control over social media outlets, which now reign supreme, accompanied by the problem of disinformation.

Meanwhile, concerns continue to rise with regard to the decline in the quality of professional journalism as fake news prevails. Such concerns are compounded by serious polarisation in the media, particularly between the private and the State owned outlets.

As MISA Zimbabwe celebrates 25 years in defence of press freedom, the greatest concern which now counteracts the successes achieved by MISA is the burgeoning of the scourge of media capture. This development negates the lofty ideals of the Windhoek Declaration.

Over recent years there has been a discernable upsurge in the momentum on the part of some stakeholders in the trend towards seeking to establish effective control and ownership of both the public and private media. This narrow-minded development is a total betrayal of the Windhoek Declaration.

Media capture seeks to preserve or promote the political or commercial interests or influence of a few politicians and corporate players.

Not only must any efforts at media capture, some of them emboldened in outright corruption, be fiercely resisted; they must be exterminated. MISA must rise to the challenge of such new initiatives by devising strategies to combat any counter-productive media manipulation.
Regional media advocacy unimaginable without MISA

BY REYNAH MASTERS

THERE is so much to think about and to be appreciative of—when looking back at what was—and certainly where we are headed. The Media Institute of Southern Africa Zimbabwe Chapter (MISA Zimbabwe) turns 25 years this year. A milestone that deserves to be celebrated and an opportunity to probe from where we started and where we are today.

For me, the most important thing, is the recognition that the media advocacy landscape of southern Africa is unimaginable without the presence of the various chapters of the region. Just as I look back on the history of what has happened in the last quarter of a century, I see a myriad of challenges, opportunities and achievements.

Together as chapters, the MISA regional network has contributed to the growth and development of the DNA of the region’s freedom of expression, access to information and media freedom domain.

While the chapters are able to act independently of each other, and focus their programming based on the needs and issues within their localities, there is a need for greater coordination and regional solidarity. The advocacy initiatives built through the MISA network is what makes the work so powerful and the institution’s presence so necessary.

You only have to think back to the SADC Journalists Under Fire campaign conceptualised two decades ago and primarily based on the stringent violations against journalists, putting them, particularly the Zimbabwean media at risk.

At the time it was ground-breaking for southern Africa. What made the SADC Journalists Under Fire stand out, was that it was strong, emotive and it personalised the plight of journalists. More importantly, it was based on the commitment that requires persistency and dedication.

But with this work comes responsibility. That responsibility is twofold. Advocacy that requires resources, and monitoring that MISA chapters were undertaking.

Through the regional secretariat, the work was elevated and built into a strong, solid and powerful campaign. This further strengthened MISA’s position to take cases to the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights.

In fact it helped transform MISA’s relations with the region. A turning point in terms of the continental bodies at the time—the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the AU through the annual ACHPR sessions.

This relationship with the ACHPR continued to raise the profile of MISA Zimbabwe and the capacity of the secretariat of MISA Zimbabwe and will hold it in good stead as we usher in the future. Bringing the issues to these two bodies is something that was and still is so needed and managed by MISA Zimbabwe. In fact strategic litigation and the strong continental advocacy and lobbying which the organisation is so successful at, is a strength that must be constantly built upon.

The very existence of MISA Zimbabwe as an organisation that builds on legal challenges around media freedom and freedom of expression combined with strong continental advocacy and lobbying campaigns is critical for the attainment of justice in the region.

But with this work comes responsibility. That responsibility is twofold. Advocacy that requires resources, and monitoring that MISA chapters were undertaking.

While looking back as though the recent granting of additional radio licences happened overnight, it is the result of commitment that built upon work started two decades ago when the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) came into being.

Through the tireless effort of MISA Zimbabwe and numerous strategic partners—a province that today, genuinely gave birth to ZACRAS (Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations), the BSA, the ZESMRA Act have opened. While we know that even this process has been long, it certainly an improvement on what existed before.

Many of the struggles we are grappling with today are similar to the battles that I remember fighting when I was still chairperson of MISA Zimbabwe.

Being the chairperson of the MISA Zimbabwe chapter in the early 2000s and working with colleagues through the highly politicised, volatile and what was the onset of exceedingly polarised media landscape, was challenging.

When I reflect on that period, I realise that I taught me so much. It was essentially a life transforming experience. It provided me with an aural moment, during which I clearly understood that the battle for media freedom and freedom of expression is not for the faint hearted. More than anything, I realised that strong and effective leadership is an integral part of the fight for justice.

To charter a course that upholds media freedom and freedom of expression, there is a need for leadership that embodies integrity, courage, fortitude and wisdom. Those who take on positions in the government council have to support a secretary-at-work that works tirelessly, often with little reward or recognition and needs to be bolstered by the confidence and trust of the trustees.

They work under difficult circumstance in a precarious environment. So a strong and effective leadership is an integral part of the fight for justice.

MISA Zimbabwe as well as the various chapters, cannot effect change around media freedom. Proponents of expression and access to information on their own. There should be achievement that there is much goodwill—regionally and nationally.

It is up to the leadership at both—secretariat and board level—to continue with these collaborative processes in a way that will contribute to a lasting and impactful trajectory that can be traced back to MISA and the elevated position it holds.

Congratulations on 25 years of commendable work and all the best for the next 25.

Reynah Masters

Reynah Masters is a journalist and the first female (former) chairperson of MISA Zimbabwe, a passionate defender of media freedom, access to information and freedom of expression.

New strategies key in the struggle and defence of media freedom in the region

BY LOUGHTY DUBE

A s the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zimbabwe) turns 25 years, there are key milestones that the organisation should strive to celebrate while leveraging on lessons learnt from bygone years.

Key reflections and critical decisions have to be made to continue the struggle for media freedom and the defence of free expression in Zimbabwe and in the region.

I will reflect on my role within the MISA Zimbabwe family when I took up leadership roles when I was elected MISA Zimbabwe deputy chairperson in 2004 and later took over the chairmanship of the organisation in 2007 up until 2012.

It was during this time that Zimbabwe faced its critical moments that defined the country as the most repressive in the region due to its fascists media laws that were used to shut down independent media while the same laws were used to silence critics and arrest hordes of journalists on trumped up charges.

It was during these trying times that I had the privilege of being the only chairperson to have worked with three different directors namely; Takura Z anguisha, Rashweat Mukandu and Nhlanhla Ngwenya. Trying times these were.

It was during this time that the MISA Zimbabwe leadership was to deal with challenges around the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), that was being used to arrest and intimidate the media fraternity.

Thinking outside the box, my board, and the secretariat, was instrumental in setting up the Media Defence Fund, and the Provincial Advocacy Committees that were critical in coordinating the work of MISA Zimbabwe.

The committees were incorporating into the MISA Zimbabwe structures and were officially recognised as key cogs in the fight for media freedom and freedom of expression.

Together during that time that MISA Zimbabwe also played a pivotal role in the setting up and establishment of critical and vital media support organisations that played an important role in supporting MISA Zimbabwe’s advocacy for a free media in Zimbabwe.

Organisations that were established included the Media Centre, Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) and the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), where I am currently employed as the executive director.

These organisations played a complementary role and targeted sectors of the media to lobby and advocate for reforms. The organisations increased the voices for media reform and created partnerships and unity in the different media spheres.

It was during this period that we expanded our lobby and advocacy to a regional level through participating in the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) sessions where we interacted face to face with government officials and highlighted human rights challenges facing citizens and the media in Zimbabwe.

MISA Zimbabwe during that time was a thorn in the face as the organisation was able to lobby and provide a collateral challenge to the government due to the former’s highlighting of media violations perpetrated by the government.

At that time I took my advocacy and lobbying for media freedom to a higher level as I was elected into the MISA Regional Governing Council (RGC), where I later became the Deputy Chairperson and a member of the Management Committee.

Later, over the years, I was appointed into the MISA Trust Fund Board (TIB), the highest decision making body in the region, a position I hold to date.

During my tenure as chairperson, it was more like a cat and mouse relationship where even the talk in government circles was to eject MISA to a regime change institutution, but that perception has changed now as MISA Zimbabwe is now consulted on a variety of media reform issues and still continues in its lobby and advocacy for media freedom.

The focal and rallying point during my tenure as chairperson, were the calls for the unbanning of the popular Daily News that had earlier been banned under the infamous AIPPA. The Tribunes, another independent paper, also suffered the same fate as the Daily News as government increased attacks against independent media.

One very key success during my tenure was to ensure that we did not have journalists wallowing in prison at any given time as many as the ones that were taking place during that time. It is also during that time that the Media Lawyers Network was established together with the capacity building of lawyers to providing legal aid to journalists in distress.

It was during that time that the MISA Zimbabwe Media Defence Fund was strengthened and fortified in order to protect journalists who were being purged through arrests.

It is during this period that we also began campaigns against the unbanning of the Daily News. Protests against the Daily News banning were popularised during this period as campaigns were held inside and outside Zimbabwe.

The struggle has been long and protract ed and MISA Zimbabwe will need to redefine strategies to continue the fight and rid the region of bad media policies and laws that infringe on citizens’ rights.

The struggle is still on. … Alloa Continual

Loughty Dube is a former chairperson of MISA Zimbabwe and currently executive director of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe. He also serves on the MISA Regional Trust Fund Board.
The accomplishments that I am proud of was being the MISA House at 48 McChlery Drive, Harare, through a SIDA grant.

Another woman also played a key role here: Janah Ncube, who assisted us in preparing the proposal to funder. The SIDA grant also purchased the first MISA Zimbabwe car that came in a curious ruby pink! Nothing to do with the female power at the organisation.

Our beloved and kind lady; the new late Paul Zaru, stood out as he drove the pink car around Harare and the country. The MISA House also brought in Joseph Makiyi, who came in as Chef, but later morphed into several valuable roles. He became the cornerstone of MISA House.

I left MISA Zimbabwe in July 2004 with a heavy heart and passed the baton to Rash- west Mukundu, who became the youngest National Director at 26 years old. I knew that I was living the organisation in good hands, and as the years passed, MISA Zimbabwe grew from strength to strength.

Rashwest turned over the directorship to Takura Zangwathwa, who brought deep thinking and heightened advocacy to the organisation. Takura passed on the (advocacy) role to Tabani Moyo, the resourceful director who has re-branded MISA Zimbabwe and placed it on the world map.

The future of MISA Zimbabwe is unique. A big wins for media freedoms. As surprising as this sounds, the Internet is now a people's platform. The media is no longer owned by the political elite. A blog post is now a people's platform. The media is no longer owned by the political elite. A blog post is now a people's platform. The media is no longer owned by the political elite.

A new reality is likely to stand out, that media spaces can only outpace the restrictions we see. Attempts at shutting down civic spaces through cyber laws are bound to fail as the online or internet based digital media spaces continue to grow and breach the most impossible to dream that Zimbabwe would be on the back foot.

Throttling the net, monopolising media space, and, in some cases, hopeless. Change, however, has outpaced the world.

In the past 25 years, some media freedom victories have been used against journalists, proof of which are the bombings of the Daily News, and VOP the dismissals of hundreds of journalists from ZBC and other state-controlled media. The political capture of some private newspapers, abuse of undemocratic media law to shut down independent media, seizures, threats and arrests of hundreds of journalists and deportations of some.

All this made media advocacy more depressing and, in some cases, hopeless. Change, however, has been built step by step and over decades and generations.

It is for this reason that 25 years on, new media entities spawned by MISA have begun to cut through the media monopoly structure in which the old order was no longer sustainable. The future of media policy must focus on not dominate, learn to share and not restrict and deny. The way forward of Prime Minister, Mnangagwa's claim on media as platforms of dialogue on national development and governance is not for control and managing information. It is only when quality information is part of our daily conversations, and the media is able to fly right misinformation and disinformation. Dis and misinformation, the gaps left by a lack of access to quality information and absence of independent organisations.

Throttling the net, monopolising media spaces such as Zimpapers and ZBC can only fuel the tensions and mistrust in an already polarised society. Apart from a few policy issues, cyber security included, Zimbabwe’s future media is anchored on platforms of content generation and information sharing.

Authorities accept this reality or always be on the back foot.

Journalists have to accept that the world in which we are has significantly changed, and that journalism is now conversational and not downloadable information to passive audiences.

We are in a world where exchange, sustainable and public interest journalism must talk more so as Zimbabwe and the entire globe face snowballing climate and environmental disasters and pandemics.

Media policy must give remote access to information, sharing and participation. Journalism must go beyond the ordinary to talk to the day to day lives.

While Zimbabwe remains in the deep waters of the political, it is important to acknowledge that the public is in the midst of dialogues and discussions.

While we still need to expand such platforms to learning to talk to the tide is favouring our people. The programming going forward must be on the people. }

Rashwest Mukundu is a Zimbabwean jurist and former national director with MISA Zimbabwe.
T hose that know me well can attest to my hatred of Mondays. They are such a depressing anti-climax from the usual restful, yet frustrating and exhausting experience of being a busy media professional. It is to the energy sapping and taxing week of fun-packed weekends that I find therapeutic.

By NHLANHLA NGWENYA

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It was that unity, which gave the organisation the courage to rebuff some of the members of the same coalition. It was that unity, which enabled the organisa-

tion to keep itself fresh as I continue to interact and engage and participate in the governance of their communities as well as mobilise and act for the betterment of their lives.

That is why such moments of advocacy as that occupied by MISA Zimbabwe, is a place I associate myself with no apologies.

It was thus with a heavy heart that I left MISA Zimbabwe on Thursday, August 31, 2017, for it had not just become my work place, but a part of my life. My workmates became my second family; the membership became an expansive group of Friends spread across the country, who, to this day, I call upon for help.

I also got linked to valuable contacts in the local, regional, media and freedom advocate organisations and media experts, not only in Zimbabwe, but the region, who to date, play an immense role in my career. But I had to leave, entranching a culture of long and hard work and dedication.

As such, working under the Media Centre management Intern. My appointment was almost a year into the career of the organisation, which MISA Zimbabwe established in 1993, with the purpose of informing and educating the media related court cases.

It goes without saying that my one-year internship period was an eye-opener. The experience gained during my time at MISA Zimbabwe, the numerous Press Club discussions that we or-
Cheers to more years of advocacy

BY DAVID MAKACHA

It seems like yesterday, but when I did the calculations, I realised it’s exactly 11 years ago when I was created as an intern.

Eleven years ago, you were just 14 years old. Some would have called you a teenager in human metaphysical terms, but with the nature of the burden you carried at that age, you would have been mistakenly labelled as an adult.

This year you turned 25, having been conceived as a Trust on 27 August 1997, growing into a fully-fledged secretariat by August 1997. Today you are celebrating your 25th anniversary following the establishment of the secretariat in 1996.

Congratulations, MISA Zimbabwe.

Indeed time flies.

This has been a journey with trials and tribulations.

Arrests, detentions, harassments (of journalists and media workers), the list goes on, as part and parcel of that existential struggle.

Today, we take pride in that the nation has achieved so far. It is common knowledge that the journey has been through a thorny path. From the days of APPA (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act), the whole world was against you.

Yet you fought tooth and nail to have media pluralism and diversity. You fought to promote free speech, equality, diversity, participation, accountability, responsibility and fairness.

As you celebrate your 25th anniversary, take encouragement in the gains achieved so far. It is common knowledge that the journey has been through a thorny path. From the days of FOSA (Public Order and Security Act) to APPA (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act), the whole world was against you.

Yet you fought tooth and nail to have media pluralism and diversity. You fought to promote free speech, equality, diversity, participation, accountability, responsibility and fairness. As you celebrate your 25th anniversary, take encouragement in the gains achieved so far.

Today you are proud of what you have accomplished and the gains that guarantees freedom of expression.

Celebrating your 25th anniversary followed by August 1997. Today you are a symbol of what we fought for.

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From an average student to upper class and distinctions

BY LYNETTE DUBE

The year was 2012, when I had to undergo compulsory internship as part of my undergraduate degree studies. I remember how I settled for a media degree simply because my parents had insisted that it was time I went back to school after two years at work, which was initially meant to have been just a gap year.

My thought process around studying Media and Society at Midlands State University was that I would be confined in a newspaper, reading the fivm news each evening on the state broadcaster.

I stepped into the MISA Zimbabwe offices in Harare in March 2012, to begin a new chapter in my life. Unmotivated by the field of study, but excited about working for an organisation that was clearly one of the ‘big brothers’ in the media industry.

I remember how some of my classmates had been given entry at the opportunity that lay before me. It was after a message from the best student in my former class, that I then made a conscious decision that I had to make the most of my one-year stint with the organisation.

My one-year stint at MISA Zimbabwe can best be explained by a glance at my academic transcript. From a mere average student whose grades in the first and second year were mediocre means to progress to the next stage. I evolved into an A class student with upper first class and distinction grades from the time I began my internship.

Not only did my grades improve from that year, but I also met the most amazing colleagues who later became family. My supervisor Kolene Majama was tough, but helped me discover that I could enjoy my studies and internship whilst making a positive change in communities.

My perspective of the media landscape literally changed because of her. She would not tolerate any slacking. I remember how I initially thought she was just a difficult person to work with, but when I went out and started working more, I got perspective on why she would constantly expect the best.

I understood that the environment sometimes demands that we put in extra work, if we are to have any real positive impact.

When days were hardest, Annie Musodza – best known by all the interns as ‘Madam’, was literally a mother. She was a pillar of strength.

To this day I always wonder how she could be that strong for herself and the hundreds of other interns that passed through her
Media: a citizen’s right that Zimbabwe must defend

Henry Masuku is a former intern with MISA Zimbabwe and freelance journalist in North America.

The press has always been pursuing journalists. Seasoned scribes who stood up to the current government were stunted. Today, we are not unrelenting and vigilant, with the remaining journalists, under siege, prepared to protect and tell the Zimbabwean story.

In January 2004, I walked into the MISA Zimbabwe offices along McChesney drive in Bulawayo, a gymnasium, where I was assigned the task of what I was going to be doing and who I would be working with. This was to become the greatest time for my journalism training in Zimbabwe.

The place was packed by Dr Sarah Chimbuta. What a visionary and iron lady who chose to stand against the regime at a time when doing so was volatile and dangerous.

Leading the information desk was Rashweat Mukundu, a vociferous fellow who spoke his mind and led the dissemination of the Zimbabwean story without fear. In the advocacy department stood a gigantic, fearless maverick, Takura Zvangapande, who made me believe I am the journalist I am today.

Not forgetting Annie Musenhamu-Musadza, who I regard as the face of MISA Zimbabwe. During this volatile era, she carried on with her information work with boldness and clarity.

Well, the first days were not so remarkable. I was the first Intern at Misa and I cherish that forever. The team didn’t quite give me the attention I was used to. I was almost everywhere. At one time in the advocacy department, another, in the information office, and another, at the front desk.

Occasionally I was asked to practise my culinary skills in the kitchen. I excelled in all departments. The team gave me tests to write when I took them for granted.

Journalists were under siege. Week in week out, we were at the courts in support of journalists who dealt with malicious charges. Even today, the regime still hounds journalists who do not follow their narrative.

That is why Zimbabwe is where it is today. With the advent of the global Covid-19 pandemic, and a largely subverted Constitution. The Zimbabwean media have been subject to devastating attacks, perils, harassments among journalists and as long as this subsists, reports from the areas with democratic values remain a mirage.

During that time, MISA Zimbabwe managed to defend journalists through legal representations, moral support and financial assistance to ensure that their-focused journalism and media literacy workshops empowered them to stand their ground for as long as time.

It was a difficult time and journalists were under immense pressure to tell the Zimbabwean story against all odds. Personally, I appreciate my time at the organisation. After my internship, which was very much appreciated by the whole team as evidenced by the farewell dinner and kind encouraging words from the team, I set forth to make a difference in my own way.

Although I remained so much in touch with the team and the overlapping activities in my advocacy skills was the fire igniting MISA Zimbabwe.

Going on to lead the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS), as the national director, revealed to me that MISA Zimbabwe had harnessed a scenario of voices fearless with intellectual acuity.

It’s over a decade that I have left MISA Zimbabwe and when I look back, I cherish the work that was done by the team which subsequently took over the great mission. The team has not relented in staking a claim that is right in terms of media freedom and access to information.

That MISA Zimbabwe still remains in this fight proves that the mandate was and is still legitimate, people-centered and on course to accomplish what it represents.

I went on to become an international freelance journalist. My eyes were opened beyond the hills. I wanted to see the world, and of course America where I am now.

Looking back, it was indeed a time of turmoil. The team at MISA Zimbabwe are at the centre of the defence of the fourth estate.

A lot needs to be done in Zimbabwe in terms of freedom of expression and access to information.

MISA Zimbabwe is on course. But the baton continues, albeit in new dimensions brought by social media.

Journalism is a noble profession, and those who remain to tell the story still do so, regardless of the pressure they suffer to do so on the back.

Well done Comrades. Happy 25 years of existence, yet we are far from fire burning. Aisa! Continue!

Henry Masuku
My internship journey began in 2006 during my internship at MISA Zimbabwe. I vividly remember that during a trip to Harare to visit the national office of MISA in Zimbabwe (MISA-Zimbabwe), I was assigned to work as an intern. My lecturer pointed to the office and said, “This is where you’ll be working. It’s a bit intimidating, but you’ll fit in.” My CV was selected from among others in the class for me to join the organization.

Armed with the naivety of a 21-year-old second-year journalist and media studies student, I walked through the doors of the journalism department where I was to be mentored by a seasoned journalist with vast writing experience and an intern who was about to leave.

I was not going to lie; it was a bit intimidating at first. MISA Zimbabwe is a prestigious organization whose work on defending and promoting media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information in Zimbabwe, is well known. I joined students in the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), and as I would soon discover, in the civil society sector as well.

In the face of this prestigious organization, it felt easy to shrivel and hide. But when life gives you such opportunities, you have no choice but to take them and give it your all. And I did. The working environment was very cordial and the team was like one big family. And, as is the case with any family, we had nicknames for each other: Hilton Zvidakai, the intern who was about to go back to university; Nyashaya “Nyasha” Nyakunu, who was the Information Officer; and Masimba “Madam Admin”. And to this day, whenever we meet, we still refer to each other by these nicknames.

I was assigned both major and minor roles within the organization and this gave me experience not only on my journey into practice but also to gain deeper insight into the journalism industry in Zimbabwe.

I conducted research with the then Director, Chris Mutoko, on articles on media violations and draft legislation in preparation for any events that the organization would carry out. Despite being assigned to this role, I was trained without hesitation by the World Press Freedom Day celebrations in Chiwonyi.

I have found myself with having an article I co-published in the first edition of the journal, Thinking Beyond. I also took to fixing printers or computers in the office and updating the organization’s website back in 2006 when even that was not just copying and pasting.

What was not prior experience or knowledge of these tasks, the organization allowed me to learn and adapt better in a professional situation I found myself in. What was supposed to be a yearlong internship turned into a year-and-a-half. My internship experience allowed me to network from different media houses and towns. This proved to be invaluable as I had a strong network of journalists whom I could call on for publication of articles and stories I did in my future roles as Information Officer and Communications Manager for different organizations.

There were days, however, when I felt that my supervisor, Nyasha Nyakunu, was not on my side. As I later found out, she had faith in my ability to succeed. During my last six months with the organization, I was joined by two other interns who were also some regular faces in the office; point out another mistake on the retake. This was an everyday experience, but one that shaped me.

Jena challenged me to write. She pushed me to publish in the local newspapers, leveraging on the peer professional relationship he shared with prominent media houses. I then started by publishing letters to the editor before slowly getting space for opinion pieces.

Then came the solid foundation upon which I built my career. Chris and Chido Musodza were also some regular faces at the organization. They were with me through their assistance. Those who follow me in my career will understand what I am trying to say.

At that back office, there, I would find the ‘most loved’ colleagues, Cde Simango and Sekuru Oblah, the finance guys. There, I would go on to complete a Master of Science in News at the University of the Witwatersrand. I have held a number of communication posts but I have also been able to move into programming with no prior experience or professional knowledge. My ability to write clearly and concisely, which I had acquired, has been fundamental in my career.

Indeed, every colleague was there in his or her own way in the whole ecosystem that was different unique parts working together to form a bubble of life. MISA Zimbabwe became my entry door into the media space. The professional network I made through the institution saw me become one of the young freelance journalists to publish articles in local newspapers.

Since, I have been a member of the International Union of replica, we would be involved in discussions, especially during major crises. I would sometimes walk down the memory lane with MISA, being equipped with institutional memories, on how things were done.

MISA Zimbabwe was still there looking for me. I was ready to be welcomed. The leading role that MISA played in the country’s media freedoms was an everyday experience, but one that shaped me. I was called to work, I was called to write, and I was called to lead. MISA became my family, and to this day, I am still a part of it.”
One rainy Monday morning in 2012

By Tony Manyangadze

One rainy Monday morning in 2012, I arrived at number 84 McIlhany Avenue in Eastlea, Harare. I had a laptop bag in my hand and this raw passion and enthusiasm to make a difference in the media industry. Most important of it, I was looking forward to learning the ropes from the media aficionados at MISA Zimbabwe.

I was taken under the wings by legends. I am forever grateful to Mrs Jaqueline Chikahanzo, Ms Keliwe Majima, Mr Nyasha Nyakumwa, Mr Tshamai Mooy, Madam Anne Musonza, and many others.

Looking back, I can attribute most of what I have accomplished so far, both as a journalist and as a media scholar, to my stint at MISA Zimbabwe.

Among other things, I learnt about media rights, media advocacy and community media in Zimbabwe. I also learnt to write news in vernacular. I got to understand, much broadly, the media landscape in Zimbabwe. Upon completing my studies in South Africa, I returned to Zimbabwe, where I briefly worked as a freelance journalist. While covering a demo, I had an unfortunate encounter with the police, and MISA Zimbabwe stood by me. They dispatched a legal representative and ensured my side of the story was heard. Their work in advocating for media rights and freedoms is commendable and crucial to promoting democracy.

Some areas can still be improved, especially that the media exists in the digital age. There are a lot of online-based media start-ups and citizen journalists that require training, support and protection from the onerous laws and policies that are being proposed to silence them. Incidentally, I am about to complete a Masters of Journalism degree in South Africa. My research focus is on independent media start-ups. The study was partly influenced by my experience at MISA Zimbabwe and it heavily relied on the reports published by MISA Zimbabwe.

Tony Manyangadze is about to complete his Masters of Journalism degree in South Africa and is a former intern with MISA Zimbabwe.

An amazing and enriching experience with MISA Zimbabwe

By Luen Nicole Phiri

MISA Zimbabwe turns 25 this year. I had an amazing experience with the organisation during my internship.

I did my internship at MISA Zimbabwe from 2019 - 2020. I am currently in Masvingo from where I have just completed my degree in Media and Cultural Studies with the Great Zimbabwe University.

My experience at MISA Zimbabwe was amazing and I learnt a lot during my internship.

MISA Zimbabwe advocates for media freedom and freedom of expression as well the right to access to information. Access to information and freedom of expression are rights which should be enjoyed by every citizen.

MISA advocated for media law reforms resulting in Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (APPRA) being repealed as it was a draconian law which limited media practitioners from conducting their duties freely.

APPRA was replaced by the Freedom of Information Act and Zimbabwe Media Commission Act. The Parliament of Zimbabwe conducted public hearings in order to get the public’s views on these laws because they affect the wellbeing of citizens.

I also had the opportunity to meet Members of Parliament during the public hearings. After these public hearings I had an appreciation of how these media laws affect the work of media practitioners.

I was delighted to witness the media law reform process and this is a success story for MISA Zimbabwe as it advocated for media law reforms to ensure a conducive working environment for journalists.

I had an amazing experience at MISA Zimbabwe as I also participated in the media law reform process.

During my internship, MISA conducted Internet governance conferences with stakeholders from various organisations in Zimbabwe and out of Zimbabwe such as South Africa and Namibia as well as media practitioners from various media houses.

These conferences taught me about digital rights such as the right to freedom of expression and the right to online privacy and the importance of these digital rights.

With the emergence of the internet, people are now using it to abuse other people’s rights such as the right to privacy and people are being cyber-bullied. Conferences like the ones held by MISA Zimbabwe help raise awareness on digital rights.

However, Covid-19 had a negative impact on my internship during my tenure as an intern at MISA Zimbabwe. I was not able to perform my duties effectively because we were not able to work from the office due to the lockdown restrictions.

At some point, the lockdown restrictions were lifted and we were able to go back to work and perform our duties effectively.

I had challenges during the early days of my internship because I was still in the learning process, but with time, I was able to write reports, organise events including media monitoring with the assistance of my supervisor and other interns.

In my opinion, MISA Zimbabwe should have a virtual internship programme as that will provide students with the flexibility to work from wherever they are, convenient for them, since we are now living in this digital era.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the MISA Zimbabwe family for giving me the opportunity to become part of their family.

They showed me the real definition of team work. I would like to also thank my mentor, Chi – Do Luciasi, for being patient with me, encouraging me and teaching me everything that I know today.

Happy 25 MISA Zimbabwe.

Luen Nicole Phiri is a former intern with MISA Zimbabwe who has since completed her degree in Media and Cultural Studies with the Great Zimbabwe University.
My experience as an intern at MISA Zimbabwe

BY NKOSIKHONA SIBANDA

I told myself I wanted to intern at MISA Zimbabwe during the first semester of my second year at University after I had attended one of their workshops in Bulawayo.

This was my first encounter with the organisation. The only other time was when I was looking for references for my assignments at school.

I was sitting at the back of the conference room at a press club meeting with Tshaino Moyi, the current acting regional director; addressing media practitioners in Bulawayo; so eloquent, articulate and well informed.

I remember the discussion was about the role of the media during elections and there were a number of well-informed journalists present, engaging and deliberating on the role they should play during the 2018 elections.

When the meeting ended, I was hooked.

I went home and did some research on media lobby groups in the region and the more common and active one from my searches was MISA Zimbabwe. I then scanned and skimmed through their website looking for opportunities that I could take up.

The most interesting thing about MISA Zimbabwe is the unity and family environment that exists at the organisation. They have a work ethic that I had not seen before. As such, I gained news writing skills, experience that I passed on to the organisation.

I was exposed to advocacy work, social media marketing skills, graphic design, writing and public communications skills.

The programme benefited me in terms of my professional abilities, my knowledge of the media sector, its regulation and international best practices on media and free expression.

The organisation under its past internship programme has produced vibrant media activists such as Vivian Marara, the current Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS) national director, and Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) chairperson.

The internship programme has a number of vital elements that help in setting a good foundation for aspiring young media and communication professionals.

Happy anniversary MISA Zimbabwe.

NKOSINI AUBREY KHUPE

I fulfilled the requirements of a Bachelor of Science (Honours) Degree in Journalism and Media studies at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Bulawayo, one had to do an internship in their third year.

An internship basically exposes a student to the work environment, an experience that is key in boosting one’s employability in the media industry. So having finished my second year, I had an opportunity to intern at the Media Institute of Southern Africa – Zimbabwe in Harare.

I started my internship on August 6, 2012 and it was to stretch for a period of anything between 8 and 12 months. My supervisor, including myself, went for an interview, I passed the interview with one colleague from NUSI. The interview was my first experience with MISA. It was professionally done.

We were assigned our supervisor, Kolwe Majama who was then the Programmes Officer responsible for Broadcast, Gender and Information Communication and Technology (ICT).

Our duties included, but were not limited to media monitoring, bulk messaging, newsletter editing, writing media alerts and media communiques. I was exposed to several activities that my first experience with journalism began. The work and people ethic I developed at the organisation was amazing.

The internship programme taught me what it means to be family. Few months into my internship I fell ill and was hospitalized at Parirenyatwa Hospital.

The support I got from the organisation and the staff members was overwhelming. Sometimes I say it is the reason why I fought to get better. Not many organisations give interns such warm treatment.

While there is a lot I can share on my experience at the organisation, it would be unfair for me not to share potential areas of improvement for the internship programme.

The world is digitalising and so is journalism and the general workplace environment.

To remain relevant, the internship programme at MISA Zimbabwe should focus a lot more on imparting digital skills to interns. This will ensure that they become relevant in the field of journalism in this 4th industrial revolution.

I would be lying if I say there were some downsides to the programme. Having learnt what it means to work in a professional environment, means to be family, I left MISA Zimbabwe a totally new person.

The work and people ethic I developed at the organisation landed me posts with very prestigious organisations such as the Rural Communities Empowerment Trust (RuCET) in the civil society sector as well as academic institutions such as the Catholic University of Zimbabwe (CUZ) and NUST.

Currently I work as a journalist and media studies lecturer in the department of journalism and media studies at NUST. I married a beautiful wife and we were blessed with one baby girl. The level of responsibility I exhibit in my work and for my family is a result of my internship at MISA Zimbabwe.

To more years of refining the media landscape in Zimbabwe and beyond. Happy anniversary MISA Zimbabwe.

Nkosi Aubrey Khuphe is a journalism and media studies lecturer with the National University of Science and Technology’s department of journalism and media studies.
30 October 2021
Cresta Lodge Msasa
Harare
Zimbabwe

We, the delegates to the MISA Zimbabwe facilitated Stakeholders Indaba on Media Law and Policy Reforms held on 30 October 2021 in Harare, Zimbabwe;

Having debated and deliberated on the national importance of media law and policy reforms in Zimbabwe;

Informed by deliberations on the state of media law and policy reforms as well as the updates on the process, policy pronouncements, requisite model laws, constitutional provisions on the same, including regional and international best practices;

Noting progress made through the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA);

Noting with great concern, the quest to entrench statutory regulation in Zimbabwe;

Concerned with the ravaging effects of COVID-19 on media sustainability and development;

Cognisant of the fact that our Constitution specifically recognises the right of all Zimbabweans to freedom of expression, media freedom, access to information and the right to privacy, among other fundamental rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights:

We hereby made the following resolutions:

1. Regulation of the media
   a) Government should allow the industry to self-regulate.
   b) The industry is committed to the agreed compromise position of co-regulation, wherein the industry is the primary regulatory body while the constitutional Zimbabwe Media Commission serves as an appellant body.
   c) Government should take into consideration the Draft Zimbabwe Media Practitioners Bill that was developed by the media industry after wide consultations with journalists in all the country’s 10 provinces.
   d) That any attempts towards entrenchment of statutory regulation in Zimbabwe will not be accepted by the industry.

2. Law Reforms
   a) Government should move with speed in its consultations and subsequent gazetting of the Broadcasting Services Act Amendment Bill.
   b) That laws such as the proposed Cyber and Data Protection Bill which passed through parliament and awaits the President’s assent, is in compliance with the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights’ (ACHPR) Revised Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information. The Declaration recognises the internet as a fundamental human right.
   c) That the government should revisit its Information and Media Panel of Inquiry (IMPI) report and its recommendations towards implementation of far-reaching policy and law reforms.

3. Media Sustainability
The media is one of the industries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, hence the government should consider the following interventions:

   a) Merging the various fragmented pockets of media development funds and establish a media development revolving fund to re-inject capital into the struggling industry.
   b) Consider tax breaks and moratoriums for a given period of time to allow the industry to recover.
   c) Ensure transparency on the current state of the Media Development Fund.