

Telling Africa's story

A major two day meeting of African editors, managing editors, media owners, representatives of journalists' unions and African media organisations has concluded in the Ghanaian capital Accra, with concrete agreements on how the media can use its agenda setting role to tell the story of Africa to the continent and internationally.



Image by 123RF

Bringing together over 30 top level African media personalities from all five regions of the continent, the forum from 11 to 12 June was organised and sponsored by the State of the Union (SOTU) and Oxfam, with support from the African Media Initiative (AMI) and the African Union Commission. The selection of senior level participants was therefore meant to enable the meeting not only to discuss, but also to make decisions on the way forward in communicating about developments on the African continent.

The forum provided opportunity for frank interaction between the AU and the media, with a combination of information sharing, discussions, brainstorming and planning. To support the discussions, the AUC delegation distributed copies of the African Union handbook and the first 10 year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 as key resources.

Media took the opportunity to highlight the challenges they face in reporting on the African Union's activities and to suggest ways of improvement.

Agenda 2063

Ambassador Jean Mfasoni, special advisor to the AUC Chairperson, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, made a presentation on Understanding the African Union, taking the editors through the aspirations and major expected outcomes of Africa's Agenda 2063, as well as key successes that have been achieved under the Agenda to date. Examples were drawn from the areas of peace, stability, good governance, democracy and human rights; agriculture, natural resource management and food security; inclusive economic development and industrialization; health, education and employment; resource mobilisation; a people's African Union; and institutional capacities and relations with regional economic communities, AU organs and partners.

“Our media needs to reflect the true Africa as it is, in an accountable and transparent manner, with its positive achievements and negative aspects to be corrected in order to reach better levels of performance for the benefit of all African peoples,” said Mfasoni, adding, “Your sustained efforts can greatly facilitate public awareness of the Africa we want, around its seven aspirations.”

Osai Ojigho, SOTU coordinator, explained that her organisation is committed to working with the AU Commission to popularise the work of the African Union and the impact it is making on the continent.

“SOTU is pushing African voices in support of the AU,” she noted. Explaining why SOTU decided to fund the editor’s forum, she said, “We want to bring the AU closer to the people and we need dialogue to see how best we can do it together”.

Ojigho presented an analysis of the status of ratification and domestication of key instruments of the African Union, adding that SOTU is engaged in lobbying for the ratification of all AU instruments continent-wide as they had been adopted by heads of state and Government to advance Africa’s development.

Eric Chinje of the African Media initiative, announced the impending launch of an information exchange platform, which would greatly benefit attempts to collate and share information coming from different media houses for more effective distribution to the African continent. He urged media to feel a sense of commitment to the continent, and play their part in achieving the goals of the AU, while at the same time urging the African Union to fully recognise the place and role of the media.

Story of Africa

Wynne Musabayana, the AUC’s deputy head of communication and information presented a technical paper on the spaces available to the media to interact with the AU. She also took the participants through planned activities to enhance the work of the media such as the proposed AU media awards, improved functions on the website, and proposed the formation of an editors’ database.

The ensuing debate shed light on the media’s work processes and requirements. She highlighted the necessity for a long term, substantive relationship with key African media editors - one that has clear strategies and an action plan so as to effectively tell the story of Africa.

She also informed participants of the upcoming editors’ forum to be held in Kigali, Rwanda on the sidelines of the summit of the African Union, using it as an example of the commission’s commitment to work with and through the media.

Marceline Nyambala of the Association of Kenya Media Women, took the meeting through the topic ‘News sources: What makes news and what does not- the role of media in making the news’. Sophie Mokoena of the South African Broadcasting Corporation presented a summary of the first day’s proceedings, emphasising the need for practical and serious efforts at telling the African narrative. She highlighted the need for leaders across the continent to avail themselves to the media in order to project the continent correctly.

Jane Godia, editor of the African Women and Child Features Services, discussed, ‘Media’s role in showcasing women leaders across the continent’, a topic that led to positive pronouncements on the need to not only profile high flying women, but also to shed light on those performing critical functions in lower positions as well as on supporting the girl child to have

equal status and opportunities in life.

The meeting ended with concrete proposals that are expected to lead to more robust reporting on the AU.

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