



AMI on the Move

By Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Trevor Ncube, Co-chairs of the African Media Initiative (AMI)

As the United Kingdom continues to be rocked by a mega media scandal and media institutions in the US continue to grapple with their identity, internet challenges and dwindling resources, the African Media Initiative (AMI) is having great success in moving confidently to create a new model for media the world could emulate.

AMI, a Pan African initiative created to strengthen private and independent media on the continent, has moved aggressively forward in providing African media leaders and the practitioners they employ with tools to help them raise their standards and provide their consumers with the tools they need to create a vibrant democracy and participate in meaningful economic development. That, in turn, will help the African people see the end to the exploitation by others and the development they need to overcome the poverty and its attendant handmaidens that exploitation has led to.

Working for two days in Dakar, Senegal, at a hotel in the shadow of a gleaming bronze statue of a family hailing the African Renaissance, we, the board of AMI had a lot to encourage our belief that we are making huge leaps on the road to Renaissance.

For example, we have recently embarked on projects we believe will have a profound impact on the African media landscape in the coming months.

They include, in the first instance, a project aimed at instilling in all media leaders' ethics as our core principle.

Therefore, we have partnered with the Media Owners Association of Kenya (MOA) to pilot an industry-led process that intends to anchor leadership and ethics at the heart of African media. At the meeting of our flagship project - African Media Leaders Forum (AMLF) - in Tunis, Tunisia later this year, we will ask all of the media owners in attendance - and there were 300 at our last meeting in Cameroon - to sign a pledge we have put together indicating they embrace the highest ethical standards and are willing to be publicly exposed if they fail to meet this goal.

Additionally, AMI has recognized the importance of mobile technology in reaching all Africans, especially those in rural areas. So, we have teamed up with the Mail & Guardian (M&G) in South Africa and Joy Multimedia (Joy FM) in Ghana to pilot innovative ways to collect and disseminate news and information to larger audiences. The Public Insight Network (PIN) being implemented with the M&G in partnership with American Public Radio allows journalists to easily find ordinary, civically engaged people anywhere in the country to speak knowledgeably about topical issues, adding new voices to the usual suspects a.k.a pundits.

PIN also allows citizens to proactively help shape the news agenda by giving them a trusted and direct channel into newsrooms for tip-offs, suggestions, and commentary.



To give incentives and reward pioneers in digital media across the continent, in partnership with Omidyar Network, Google and the U.S. State Department, AMI will launch in November an African News Innovation Challenge which will be the first continental showcase for home-grown solutions and innovation in the media sector.

Moreover, in order to respond to rapidly changing market conditions, as well as meagre funds, AMI is spearheading the establishment of a continental network of “innovation laboratories” that bring together journalists and technologists for low-risk, rapid-prototyping that experiments with new ways to produce and disseminate news. Pilot projects are set to launch in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda within the next month. We are currently in discussions with mobile companies for material and technical support.

And these are only a few of the giant steps AMI has taken in the past few months, with more to come as we consult with our colleagues and stakeholders and experts with the same commitment around and outside the continent. We do not intend to be a top-down organization!

Clearly, AMI is on the move and is inspired by the cooperation and support we are getting from donors, as well as the media community we are wholeheartedly committed to serve for the benefit of citizens around the continent, as well as outside. For a thriving, productive Africa is one which will not only benefit Africa, but also its neighbours in the world. African media must be equipped to share that truth and tell its story for Africa to take its rightful place in the world, its citizens must be empowered and able to participate in the continent's development and governance. AMI is confident that it is putting in place the building blocks for this to happen.