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FMpowering Women

Jeremy: This morning in association with the Media Monitoring Project and the Open Society Foundation, another in our series of radio conferences and it will last a full hour. And today the power of radio and its ability to influence and empower women.

Two guests in the first 30 minutes of the programme and I'll give you details of the second lot of guests a little later on. We have in our Cape Town studio today Judith Smith who is the director of the Southern African Media Gender Institute, Judith a very good morning to you.

Judith: A good morning to you too Jeremy.

Jeremy: Nice to talk to you and I'm sitting here in Johannesburg with me William Bird who is the director of the Media Monitoring Project.

William to you first of all, why are we having this debate. Give us an overview first particularly in terms of how much influence radio has in terms of this particular issue.

William: I think it is quite clear as you mentioned earlier that its national women's month so there are a lot of initiatives looking at women and how they can be empowered. We thought it would be a really good idea to look at radio specifically. Radio is the one medium that is able to reach audiences throughout the world and there are very few communities that do not actually have access to radio. When they do have access to some kind of medium, it usually tends to be radio.

So it has an ability to reach people whose voices generally don't get heard. Radio has that unique ability to help realize that right to information in other words to receive and impart information. And because of the ways radio works it really is able to do things and act in ways that I think a lot of other media would struggle to do with the kinds of budgets and the kinds of issues and the kinds of areas that we are dealing with. And you will hear in the programme as we go on, I mean we are talking about things from gender-based violence to women in rural areas to young girls and HIV and all these kinds of things. So it's quite an amazing medium and we thought given the emphasis on national women's month, we thought it would be a very valuable idea to look at radio around the world and some of the programmes that have been made and how they have been used to help and empower women.

Jeremy: I will play in some of that audio a little later on in the programme but Judith to you in Cape Town. William talks about radio's unique ability but with that unique ability also comes an awesome responsibility in terms of this issue?

Judith: Absolutely Jeremy. You know radio is immediate and faster than newspapers and television. And it is very important that radio gets it right the first time because of its immediacy later on after a broadcast someone might not be listening any longer and to correct that is very difficult. So yes it is very important and extremely powerful and also radio is extremely inclusive, it reaches most people including the poor, the marginalised and those who cannot read and write.

Jeremy: William lets get this one out of the way first is we can. Is it the remit of public radio only or does commercial radio also have a responsibility in this regard?

William: Well I think obviously public broadcaster like the SABC have a far greater responsibility particularly to meet these kinds of needs, precisely because they have a significantly broader mandate. But a lot of the examples that we've been finding tend to be produced by NGOs and many of them by small community radio stations and just by other kinds of initiatives. One of them for example came from a group of women who were meeting to talk about women's role in peace and they said how do they get other women in our areas to hear about these things and they said they needed to use radio.

So very often these were initiatives that have been driven by women themselves in order to try and play some kind of positive role. I don't think that very often the sense of commercial radio is that they are there to make money and they forget in that spectacular power that they can and do actually have.

Jeremy: Do they sometimes not use that power then in terms of this particular issue?

William: Undoubtedly. I think one of the reasons we are trying to highlight some of these international examples is to show what really can be done on radio. And I think certainly commercial radio should be making a greater effort in many respects to try and follow some of their initiatives.

Jeremy: Well Judith in terms of radio broadly in this country, how do we perform then when it comes to the empowerment of women? Do we do a bad job or a good job?

Judith: The potential to do a brilliant job exists. Particularly national radio has reached far beyond the broadcasting foot print of many other smaller radio stations, and it really comes down to our ability to reach those people, the marginalised, the poor, the rural women particularly who are burdened with poverty, HIV/Aids, unemployment and all those social problems. I think that radio is the one medium that has the ability to reach those people and that I think it does a very good job at the moment. But it does have room for improvement.

Jeremy: Where does it fail then and what issues should be raised?

Judith: Well issues that are pertinent to the communities that it serves is very very high in the agenda. More often than not, the agenda is set internally and we need to engage with people outside of the studio to get the community issues on the table and open for discussion.

Jeremy: William Bird, we've had this discussion before about radio, television and the electronic media generally and whether it's an entertainment medium or whether it is a medium of education. Now certainly when it comes to public service broadcasting there is an element of both. But you will concur that in many ways all of this is a hybrid. Is that when people switch on the radio one is for information and they also want to be entertained as well. Where do women's issues fit into that particular continuum?

William: Well I guess that fits in along with every other kind of issue. If radio has done well I think it will always be entertaining even if it is about plumbing in your house or something as mundane as that. It will always be entertaining provided it is done well.

Jeremy: You know you are going to get a lot of calls from disaffected plumbers?

William: Yes, possibly but also I think if you make it relevant to the audience then it will also spectacularly, then it will also be entertaining. You were talking earlier to the Daily Sun, in various aspects the Daily Sun is quite an imaginative publication and that many of the stories are quite literary imagined. But I think one of the advantages that they have is that those stories are directly relevant to the communities that they are targeting. And I think similarly if you do radio programmes with and getting back to the women's issues, looking at issues that are directly affecting women. If they are speaking to those women then the chances are it will be incredibly successful and you'll get strong and good listener ship as we see from many of the examples actually.

Jeremy: Judith isn't it one of the problems that radio often doesn't speak to the people that are actually affected by all of these. We tend to go for the analysis on the experts and the ivory tower views but we don't take out those microphones into the rural communities perhaps and actually deal with those issues properly. Surely that's one of the big failings?

Judith: That is indeed so Jeremy, I agree with you there and that's why it is important for radio to spread its wings a bit further than just those ivory towers that you spoke of. And that's why community radio is so important for those women in the rural areas particularly those that don't have access to other forms of media.

Jeremy: This morning in association with the Media Monitoring Project and the Open Society Foundation another in our series of radio conferences, and today we are looking at the power of radio and its ability to influence and empower women. Another in our series of radio debates on SAFm in association with the Media Monitoring Project and the Open Society Foundation.

William Bird director of the Media Monitoring Project lets get some of the audio that you've brought in with you this morning. The first I understand deals directly with the power of radio and helping to raise awareness of women's rights. Set this one up for us.

William: Yes Jeremy, it is produced by an organisation called International Women's Tribune Centre and it essentially emerged from a workshop held in Kenya on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which might sound a little bit peculiar but when you start to listen you'll see it gives meat to these things. Essentially what happens, these women from the great lake regions make use of a traditional format of radio, which is known as the advert, and they raise issues about domestic violence, rape, bodily integrity and the impact of conflict on women.

Advert 1:

Hi, I am a former women and child abuser. I have learned that real men do not abuse. But it is too late for me. I lost my wife and child.

Let us respect and protect the most vulnerable as their safety is guaranteed by the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325. Please do not wait until it is too late.

Advert 2: <9:10 – 10:48> Listen to the mp3 on www.mediamonitoring.org.za to hear advert.

Jeremy: Right, so simple advertising there. A single message but in some of that you would hear a powerful narrative.

Judith Smith, director of the Southern African Media Gender Institute. How do you relate to that particular audio and why do you think it works?

Judith: It works because it speaks directly to the problem. The first one particularly the first track where the man confesses to being an abuser is particularly emotive it lights your imagination, really really think about what it means to be an abuser and that a man is standing up and saying that I am an abuser and that it is wrong is a very powerful message indeed. Whilst the resolution might not mean much to the people in the rural areas, that a man is standing up and talking about it and is saying that we need to protect women and children and that we need to cease the abuse is very very powerful. And women speaking on issues of peace and armed conflict really puts the issue right there on the table.

Jeremy: That was the first one, which was essentially advertising. This same group the International Women's Tribune Centre has also done something else with drama. Perhaps set the next one up for us.

William: Yes indeed again relating to the UN Security Council Resolution and what I like about this is that they take something that is a dry piece of paper, a dry resolution and they dramatise it. And here you'll hear that it is a little bit structured again but it's something about their tries to make the resolution a reality.

[Empowering messages [12:22 – 16:12]

Jeremy: Radio from the great lakes region. Now Judith Smith from the Southern African Media Gender Institute, you were listening to that as well. To me it sounds very artificial and scripted and structured. Does it really ram the message home?

Judith: I agree with you that it does sound scripted and structured. I think that message was extremely unifying in that it spoke to women who might be isolated. Women could relate to that message in that where they are not close to their loved ones or through distance are separated and hearing that message that message could speak to that thing of isolation that I'm not alone and there are others who are suffering like this, and with a really strong call to mobilise and do something about it. I really like that message.

Jeremy: Is there any guarantee though that it would result in mobilisation?

Judith: There are no guarantees. What is important is the message itself.

Jeremy: Our radio conference continues this morning through to 11:00am today. The power of radio and its ability to influence and empower women and my two guests with me now, I'll introduce to you to a few others a little later on this morning. Judith Smith, director of the Southern African Media Gender Institute and William Bird who is the director of the Media Monitoring Project.

Jeremy: William I know we've confined our discussion this morning to radio specifically but we shouldn't run away from the fact that this is a broad media issue and surely there has got to be synergy between the radio medium and other media as well in terms of imparting a clear message.

William: That's a critical point. I think one of the other organisations that we are going to be listening to in a little while, I think Outer Voices, one of their strategies is to work with radio and to supplement that with information materials so other forms of media. So if they've got an initiative on helping women prevent gender based violence, they'll have radio programmes and they'll also have pamphlets, they'll have information about the law, where they can go for assistance. So at least something if we are addressing particular issues and meeting peoples key needs that we supplement all of that with other forms of media.

Jeremy: Judith you correctly said before our commercial break that there are no guarantees but it is absolutely critical that we are not broadcasting this type of thing into a void, that once the message is designed and broadcast, there have to be mechanisms of follow up and I wonder if organisations even organisations like yourself are good enough at phase two of all of this?

Judith: When we do our communication strategies you know, we do include radio, we encourage our participants to do PSA's etc, as part of our training and we do encourage a multi level communication strategy with for and our campaign advocacy work. And it is very very important as you rightfully said to back it up with other forms of media to ensure that the message does truly mean something to people out there.

Jeremy: When you are developing a communication strategy on a particular issue, are you setting yourself quantifiable objectives?

Judith: Absolutely, that is why we work with the communities themselves when we develop these campaigns and communication strategies.

Jeremy: William Bird we focused on the first half hour of the programme on Southern Africa most notably the great lakes region but obviously it is a global issue as well isn't it?

William: Yes certainly.

Jeremy: And you referred a little earlier to an organisation called Outer Voices.

William: Yes exactly and Outer Voices is an organisation that works and disseminates programmes throughout the Pacific Island in the Asian Pacific ring. And I think one of the things they try and do is try and access the voice of grass roots women. So its not something again that is unique to South Africa or Africa in fact. And this next piece is about girls of Cambodia and it deals specifically with how they have been forced into sex work. As you'll hear, it is quite a different format, it's more documentary style and I also think it is very powerful.

Empowering message 20:12 – 25:23

Jeremy: Part of the radio documentary on sex trafficking, it was put together by an organisation called Outer Voices. Judith you listened to that excerpt of the radio documentary. A great use of sound, that's just the radio person coming out in me but also very haunting simple scripting. How should women have responded to that particular excerpt?

Judith: Well I think women would respond very well to that excerpt. With the variety of voices even though there was a narrator who said the context, there were several women and young girls that spoke in the first person. So it wasn't someone telling their story, it was them telling their stories themselves. And that is very very powerful.

Jeremy: William Bird what is your response to that?

William: One of the things that I really like about it is that sometimes you might read some of the statistics that you heard there but I think it's a lot powerful coming from someone when she says I was taken and sold for \$200 and you think \$200 that's an ipod nano or something. It's a ridiculous amount of money to be selling a person and treating them as some kind of consumer good.

Jeremy: And Judith the secret here and William raises a very important point doesn't he, it is to move away from the raw statistics and to put a face to the statistics. Something that radio can do through the use of sound but often we fail to get that right.

Judith: Absolutely, statistics are so boring and you really need a lot of concentration to understand it. But as William correctly said when it's put in that context, when it is quantified with money and the value attached to it and a human being saying it really hits home.

Jeremy: Lets bring a third member into our panel now and it's a well known voice on SAFm, its Nancy Richards, who is the presenter of Our Programme Otherwise, Nancy a very good morning to you in Cape Town and welcome. Your job and I guess all of our jobs we get it right sometimes and often we get it wrong, its about telling the story as you might have heard in that particular narrative that we played out. It is actually critical to get behind the statistics, isn't it?

Nancy: It certainly is and the value of something like that is that it becomes a sort of shared experience. You know a woman can hear something like that and say she is telling my story.

Jeremy: Is that how you see your programme Nancy, as women sharing experiences?

Nancy: It is a shared experience aside from the fact that our programme, but many women programmes, it is sort of a safe platform for a woman to have her own voice heard. But that's one thing for her but it is also a wonderful thing for other women to hear it because women are very good at sharing stories, I mean that's what they do anyway, radio is some ways like what women do, they network, they share, they enquire each other, they give each other advice, they listen and they praise one another. So for a woman to hear somebody else's story she can think absolutely, if she responded to it like that, I could maybe do that.

Jeremy: As the steward of all of this on your particular programme Nancy, do you feel imbued with a great sense of responsibility?

Nancy: Yes. In as much as one has to sort of choose that stories that are going to be useful to other people, but I think one just sees oneself as a bit of a conduit really. That sort of says, look we are here, this is your platform, come on board, say your say and then go on. And what we don't always get is we don't know always know who does it reach. But I'm sure as you do, one sort of hopes that if its reached one pair of ears to whom its made a difference, its all been worthwhile.

Jeremy: I was intrigued that you used the words or the phrase, a safe platform for women. Why does it need to be a safe platform for women?

Nancy: Well I'll tell you why I used that word. I used it because it is used a lot for women because there is something about in the company of women there is woman here in Cape Town called [Maleko Nglobu 02:07] who has written a

poem about 'In the company of women'. And when you are in the company of women, I don't know Jeremy you've probably never been to a girls group.

Jeremy: Sadly I've never been invited.

Nancy: Well we'll have to rectify that, but you can listen into otherwise. But when women are together, there is a safety, there is sort of collective, there is a, I'm protected by sisters around me. I mean I know that sounds a little bit like [she wau? 02:30] . But it is true, which is why women have girls night out, that's why they have book clubs, that's why they have support groups and there is something very safe about it. Which isn't to say that a woman's program isn't listened to by a man. Because of course they was a point where I think we had 50% male listeners to our programme and I don't know if that's still the case, its hard to tell. But you know that in itself I think is a very useful thing because the more the genders understand about each other the better.

Jeremy: Let me put a question to both you and Judith and Nancy if you could answer it first. Is there a danger that we might pigeonhole women's issues through a dedicated programme such as yours? Surely it's something that should be done across the broad spectrum of radio.

Nancy: I think the other word that you use is gathering. So many times we heard do we really need a woman's programme and I think well maybe not, maybe not, but I think we do. And I think because it is a safe place and because it is an area particularly on radio, which is quite news driven. It's an area that has sort of, one can compare it to the magazines versus the newspaper. It is not an area that has been trivialised yet, which is an issue perhaps more interest to women than men and I think maybe we don't need it in as much as we need to be empowered because everybody needs to be empowered, but maybe we need it because it one area that we can hear the stuff that we want to hear.

Jeremy: Judith what's your view on that?

Judith: I agree with Nancy, women's needs are so much different to men's needs in that we are still battling for recognition, for gender equality and programmes that speak directly to us, that voice our opinions, that talk about what we need is really important and I really think women programmes are great.

Jeremy: Nancy, Judith has raised the issues just in terms of inequality. Do you set about your programming then with a very deliberate long term set agenda in order to facilitate change?

Nancy: One of the things about women is that they are changing, they are a dynamic group again as are all people. Here in South Africa things have changed so radically and drastically for women and I suppose in some ways one tries as best as one possibly can on a daily programme to keep up with that change because if you look at the history of this particular programme, I'm sure if you look at the history of this station, it reflected that change. The women's programme is fifty something years old and when it first started it was really white. They were talking about antiques and decorating and other things as well.

But now, hopefully, it speaks for all women in South Africa, of all ages, of all cultures, of all race groups, all backgrounds, all interests in as much as it is possible to do that. But I sense the change like a tidal wave. The way things have changed for women since apartheid, when women are talking about their businesses, they are inspiring one another. I mean going back to this thing about you telling my story, it is aspirational thing, she is telling a story that could be mine. We had for instance [Sawen the South African Women's Entrepreneur Network, 5:26] the amount of women who started their own businesses who have come from nothing and are making such huge strides.

That's what we are trying to reflect, but I mean sorry to go on and on but I'm sitting here at the moment in a place called [Barrydale 05:42] it is beautiful but on the other side of the mountain, there is a whole community of women who are battling with alcoholism, who are battling with drugs, they are battling with tik, they are battling with young people who have got nothing to do. And those are the sorts of women who one would like to think whether or not our station is able to do that, those are the women who need to be empowered with inspiring stories about women who have cracked it. You know what I mean?

Jeremy: I am going to go round the table one more time for closing remarks from our panelists this morning. I think we've built the case this morning that radio is very powerful influence as far as this particular debate is concerned. So Judith Smith, director of the Southern African Media Gender Institute, let me come back to you, I think we've made the case like I said, what direction then would you like to see radio moving in terms of this particular debate?

Judith: What I would really like to see is a more diverse range of voices, a more diverse range of issues, that women are not just interests as Nancy alluded to, in letting patterns and antiques and decorating the home. We are business women, we are entrepreneurs and I'd really like to see radio cover that whole spectrum of women's interests, and invite women from rural areas to speak of their influences as well.

Jeremy: William Bird I think that Judith raises a very important point, two particular points, one is a multiplicity of voices. I wonder sometimes if the media itself works hard enough in finding those voices and Nancy did alluded to it and I think it is also critical that we don't become trapped with the same issues the whole time and that we are on this issue treadmill. We have got to find other issues as well surely. Not with standing that they are important issues they have got to be dealt with. But as I said a little earlier with another interview, all this is about shifting sand isn't it?

William: Diversity means just that. It means diversity of issues, diversity of voices. And as you'll know from our previous discussions around women and their representation in media they tend to be and they are still marginalized in across most formats of programming. So I think you've got some excellent initiatives and Nancy's would be one of those and we've got a few of those in some of our other public broadcast service so I think we need to look for some of those. But I think one of the things I love are from Outer Voices which I'll finish my section on is to quote a woman which will be more appropriate, she says, " We do this because we know that women only work in their own regions on behalf of their

own communities can affect long lasting, non violent social change. We know that the media can be a tool for getting their voices and their stories heard"

Jeremy: So in other words what direction should radio be moving in this particular debate, what would you like to see happening?

William: Of course what we would like to see is hearing a greater diversity of voices, to see radio taking on some of the initiatives that we've just introduced. I mean there are a whole series of others many of them in other African languages, which unfortunately don't work so well for SAFm, but I think we need to be encouraging those kinds of initiatives. Getting people out there, taking the radio out of the studio and into the communities where the people are.

Jeremy: And Nancy Richards you have to agree with that wouldn't you?

Nancy: Absolutely and the most powerful interviews we've had is when we were out there on the streets talking to women in their own spaces. But for me the direction it would be really wonderful that it could take is that if there could be still more educational, still more informative. I have a feeling Jeremy that you might agree with this or not is that what women want from a radio is less opinion and more advice, more practical information, take on a more educational role. I heard once from a woman who had seven radios in her house, I mean she was obviously in that sort of income bracket, one in every room so that she didn't miss anything. She called it her university. And one wants to retrieve that, have phone ins where people get advice, and get information. It is a community radio thing largely but it something that we can all learn we shouldn't pressure away invaluable airtime that's teaching us all but principally teaching our women who are so hungry for knowledge and information.

Jeremy: And in dealing with those issues not to recycle them perhaps Nancy but also being a little bit more creative in the way in which they are covered?

Nancy: Oh yes, there is a danger with daily deadlines for all of us, you don't want to go the same route. It's the same with the HIV stories, you've got to think differently, put a human face on it and move with the flow as quickly as it is flowing, and it is flowing very fast, flowing as fast as women think.

Jeremy: And that's where we are going to leave it this morning. Nancy Richards presenter of Our Programme Otherwise here on SAFm, my thanks as well to Judith Smith who is the director of The Southern African Media Gender Institute and also William Bird who is the director of the Media Monitoring Project. I'm Jeremy Maggs as always thank you very much for listening.