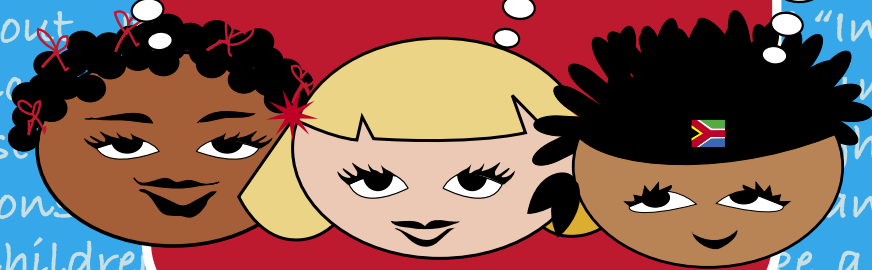


Children's Views on the News



EMPOWERING children & media



Good News

Acknowledgements

MMP would like to thank the children who participated in the *Empowering Children & Media* project for their invaluable contributions.



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ABOUT CHILDREN

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“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

(Nelson Mandela, speaking on behalf of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, 1996)

Introduction

In 2003, the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) together with children investigated the representation of children and children's rights in the South African news media. The monitoring revealed that children are often under-represented and misrepresented in the news.

Children monitors also raised a number of issues about the news and the way in which stories featuring children are profiled. For example, children are largely depicted as victims of adult forces and societal circumstance, rather than active, empowered individuals. The media also violates children's rights to dignity and privacy when children involved in abuse cases or other criminal proceedings are named and identified.

Through this research, the MMP and its partners aim to create awareness of the ways in which children are portrayed in the media and encourage an ethical reporting culture which respects children. *Empowering Children & Media* highlights some of the research findings and serves as a guide for journalists, editors and sub-editors when reporting on children.

Research methodology

The *Empowering Children & Media* project monitored and analysed approximately 22 000 news items from 36 different media including print, radio and television. From March to May 2003, every item that contained a reference to a child or children was monitored by the MMP, and relevant information was captured about the topic, sources, representation and other issues.

The most exciting and innovative component of the project was the participation of children themselves. The children engaged in a parallel monitoring project where they monitored the media for a two-week period. This was done so that the children could express their views directly, and so that they could see for themselves how the media represented them.

Participation workshops were held in three provinces (Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal) and gave children the opportunity to share their perceptions of the way they are represented in the

media, what they thought was important in the news, and most importantly they were able to develop critical media literacy skills. In addition, the children were given the opportunity to make their own newspapers. This exercise illustrated that news is determined out of choice and that the perspectives of journalists and reporters shape the news.

In addition to the provincial diversity, children from different backgrounds and diverse ages, races and sexes participated in the project. Working with children in participatory workshops requires a skillful, ethical and professional approach. For this reason Clacherty and Associates, who are experts in this field, were contracted to run these workshops.

In order to ensure that children would be able to continue applying the critical media literacy skills they had acquired during the project, they were provided with radios from the Freeplay Foundation. As many of the participating children had limited access to resources, it was important that they were not disadvantaged and this was ensured through the selection of the solar and friction powered Freeplay radios.

As a key element of the MMP's partnerships with SANEF and other media stakeholders, the MMP will, during 2004, conduct specialist journalist training to bring the diversity of children's issues into the newsrooms, address strengths and weaknesses in reporting and help ensure the participation of children in the media.

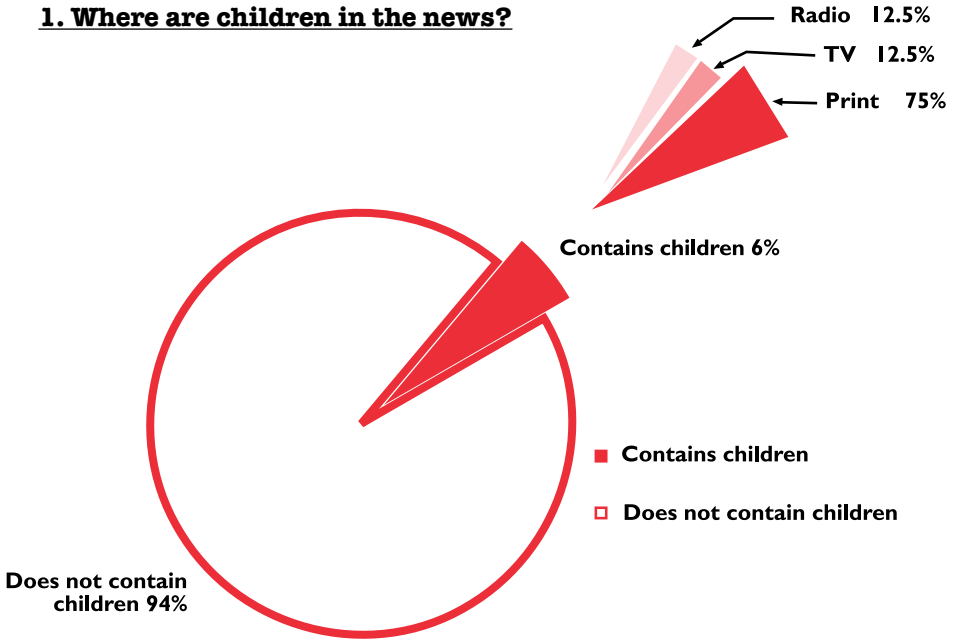
Key research findings

I. Children are under-represented in the media

Children feature in only 6 percent of news items, according to the monitoring conducted by the MMP's adult monitors. This is exceptionally low, especially considering that children under 18 years make up 32 percent of the South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2001 Census).

The majority of items depicting children appear in print – 75 percent – with the remaining 25 percent of items evenly split between radio and TV. Considering TV, Print and Radio on their own, however, the ratio of children's stories in relation to all other stories is lowest for print.

1. Where are children in the news?



The children’s monitoring project revealed similar results and many of the child monitors commented on how little coverage they received in the news media.

“The news made me feel left out. It’s like children don’t exist.”

“In this newspaper you see more information about cell phones. There is only one about children.”

“There is nothing on the radio news about children. These guys, they don’t think our issues are important.”

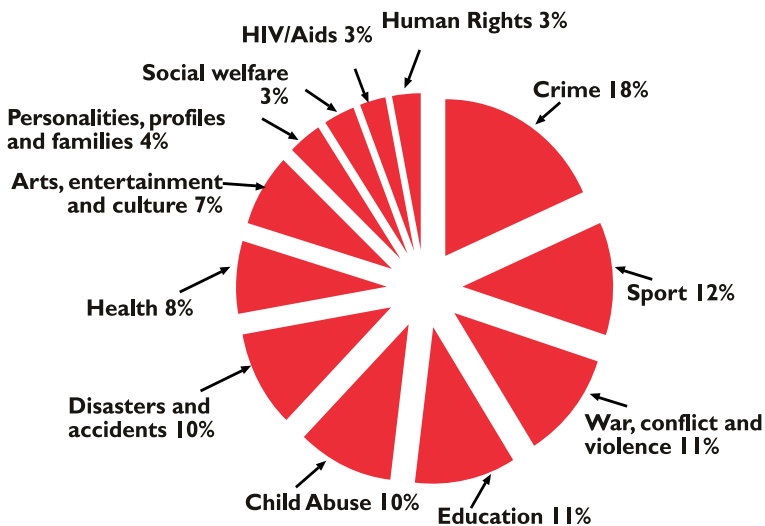
“In South Africa children are totally ignored, TV shows and newspapers should try harder to look in the problems of the young generation.”

When the children constructed their own newspapers, however, they made sure the publications contained articles about both adults and children.

2. Children are mostly represented in negative stories

Both the adults' and children's monitoring revealed that, when children do appear in news stories, the stories are predominantly negative. Graph 2. "What are the stories with children about?" represents the top 12 stories with children, making up 90% of all the stories. It illustrates that 1 in 2 stories featuring children relates to negative items such as crime, violence, abuse or disasters. While it is a common feature of news to report on "bad news" stories such as crime, violence and abuse, it is the manner in which they are reported that often contributes to children being primarily viewed as victims.

2. What are the stories with children about?



The children commented on this negative trend of reporting:

“They only show bad things that happen to children, they never speak about the good things that we do as children.”

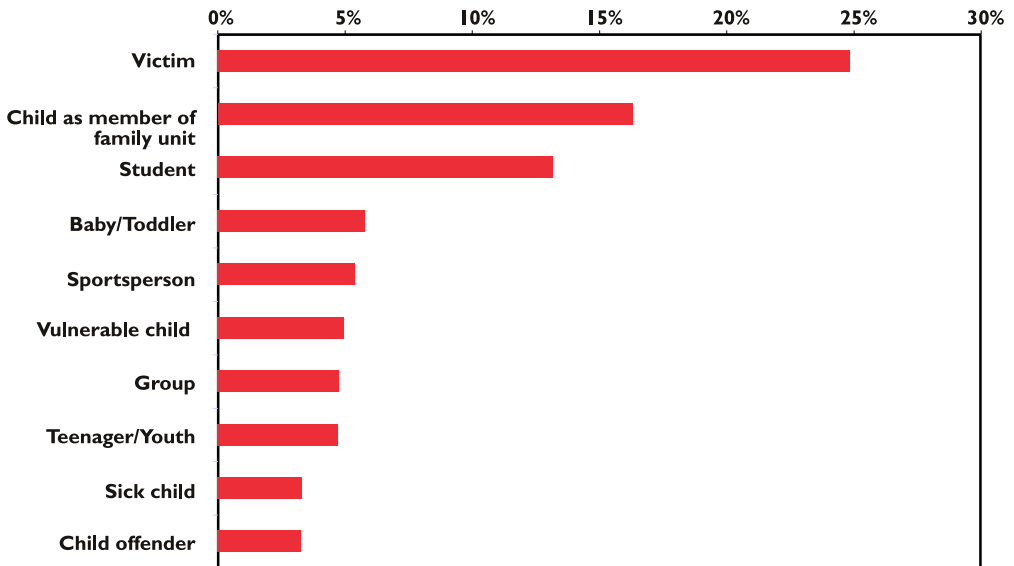
“In every news bulletin there are children who are raped, street kids, orphans and more, this is bad for children.”

In the children’s newspaper-making exercise, there was a balance of positive and negative stories and the children often used the negative stories to provide their readers with information and meaningful messages. The children all regarded child abuse as an important issue on which to keep the public informed – they also, however, acknowledged the trauma of the victims, rather than representing them merely as statistics.

3.Children are predominantly represented as victims

More than 25 percent of items monitored, portrayed children as victims. In addition, in 5 percent of the items children were represented as vulnerable children e.g. as orphans and street children, and in 3 percent of the items children were represented as sick. This confirms the overwhelmingly negative discourse in which children are represented as well as the limited roles they are seen to occupy.

3. Top 10 roles that children play in news stories.



The children’s monitoring confirmed this trend and the children commented that the media should make an effort to represent children in more positive roles:

“I really love this article because it says the boy is a hero. It shows children can do things.”

“I think they must put in more about children’s rights and responsibilities. Parents don’t give children their rights and children need to know about them.”

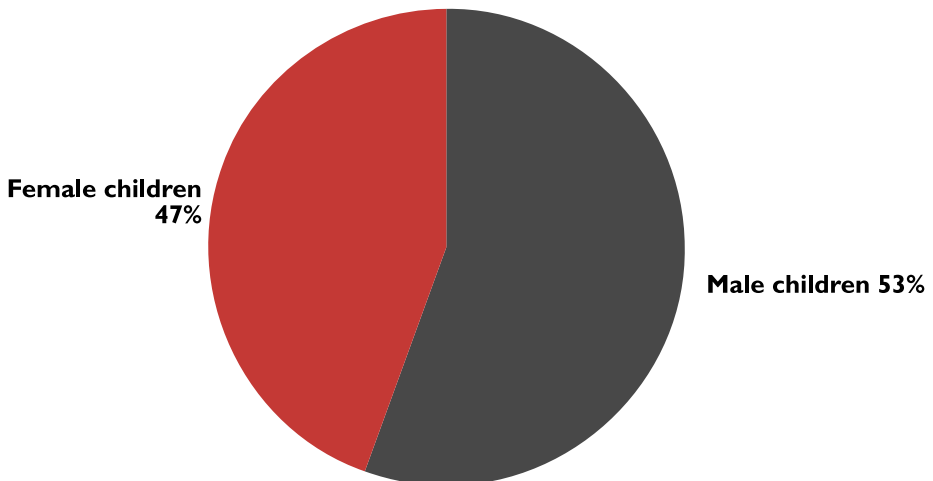
In the newspaper-making exercise, the children made a particular effort to represent children in more positive and empowering roles to juxtapose the negative news items and provide a more diverse representation of children.

4. Male and female children are equitably represented but still stereotyped

Male children are represented in 55 percent and female children in 45 percent of items, according to the adult monitoring. This is a surprising result since previous research by the MMP including the Gender Media Baseline Study (Gender Links, MISA & MMP, 2002 Gender Media Baseline Study) has found that men are given far more coverage (4 times more), and on a wider range of topics, than women in the media (for South Africa the figures are 81 percent male and 19 percent female sources *ibid*).

A closer look at the topics in which female and male children appear, on the other hand, shows that gender stereotypes are perpetuated

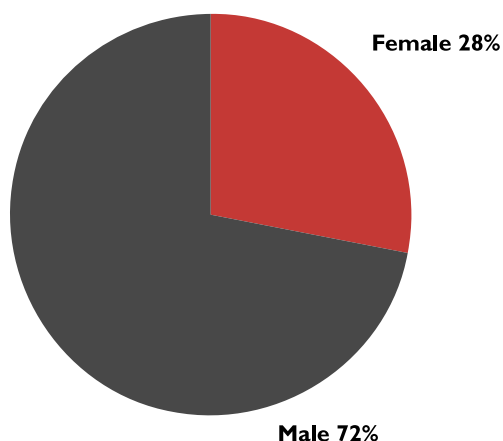
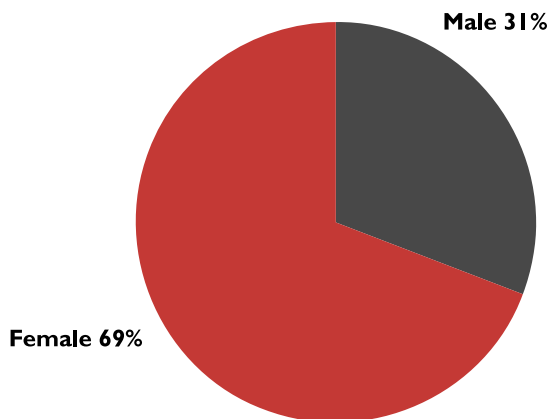
4. What is the sex of the children who appear in the news?



in the media. Female children are more likely to appear in stories of child abuse, while male children are more likely to appear in sports-related stories. This reinforces the broader societal stereotype of women as predominantly victims and men as predominantly heroes.

Representation of children in stories on child abuse

Representation of children in stories on sport



Children are aware of the ways in which popular media images of men and women influence the way that people think, particularly with regard to portrayals of women.

“The media is putting an image in children’s minds that looking like a star or model is the only way you will be accepted in society.”

5. Top ten issues raised by children

When the children participating in the study were given the opportunity to express their opinions about the news they raised a number of issues. Table 5. “Top 10 children’s issues in the news media” indicates these issues, which make up 79% of the total of all the issues raised.

Many of these issues reflect the adult monitoring results for example that crime, war, conflict and violence, child abuse, and disasters and accidents were some of the most common stories containing children. The children commented on how they notice these negative aspects and that they don't like death and killing. They also noticed that children are under-represented in the media, but also argued strongly that they should be included in the news – this reflects the finding in the adult monitoring that children are only found in 6% of news stories. The children also raised the issue that children are largely represented as victims. This clearly reflects the finding in the adult monitoring where more than 25% of the items monitored portrayed children as victims.

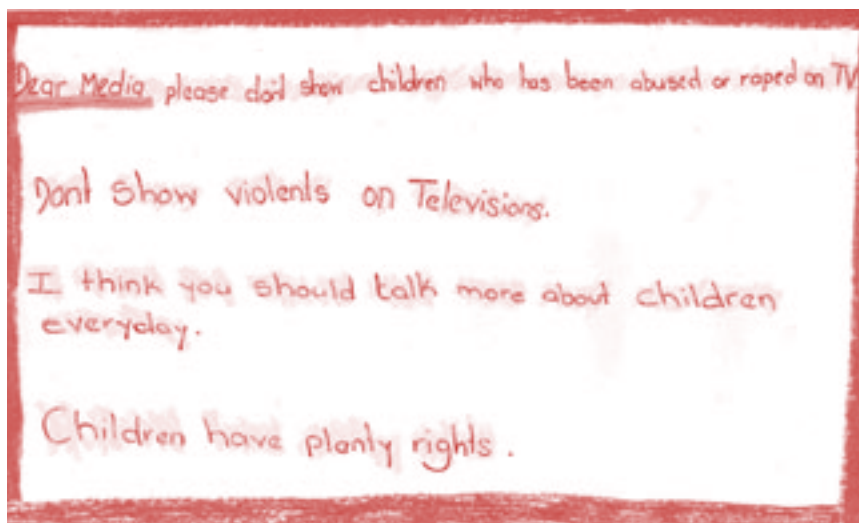
On a positive note, the children commented on the good job the media does in helping to locate missing children and in helping sick children get funding for expensive operations. This reflects the issue that the children raised that helping needy children and people is good.

5. Top ten children’s issues in news media

Issue	Total %
• Children notice/don't like death and killing	15%
• Children should be included in the news	13%
• Children are victims	12%
• Children are not represented in the media	10%
• Children have a right to protection/education/ provision/health care	9%
• Children enjoy sport and entertainment	9%
• Child abuse is horrible	4%
• Children notice crime	3%
• Helping needy children and people is good	2%
• Criminals should not go unpunished	2%

DON'T EXPOSE CHILDREN TO CRIME

The following poster is an expression of these issues in a child's own words.



The way forward

“The child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.”

(Constitution of South Africa, Bill of Rights, Section 28)

The findings of *The Empowering Children & Media* project challenge the print, radio and television media to change some of the ways in which stories featuring children are reported.

The MMP with its partners; Save the Children Sweden, UNICEF, SANEF and the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) is committed to continue empowering children by giving them critical media literacy skills and working together with other organisations and media bodies to promote better representation of children in the media. Journalist and media practitioners are encouraged to work in partnership with these organisations to achieve these goals. Positive and powerful change in the representation of children can only take place if the media and media practitioners themselves take on this responsibility and exiting challenge.

How can the media empower children and respect their human rights?

Ethical reporting requires a balance between the rights of a child against the rights of the media to report on an incident, and the right of the public to information. There are many issues to consider, especially around whether or not to reveal the identity of a child under 18 years. In these instances, reporters and editors should ask the following questions before naming children in the news:

- Will it endanger the child's life?
- Will the child be at risk, of either physical or emotional harm?
- Will the child be stigmatised?
- Will this affect the outcome of any legal action in which the child may be involved?

The children interviewed by MMP voiced their concerns as follows:

“I think it is better that there is no photo because if you had the face it will affect the child. If they had the details about the child you can go and find that child, then the child will be more scared and people will tease her. They will keep on bringing back the subject. It won't be good and healthy for the child.”

“This is good because (it does not show her face). If they had shown her face, when she walked on the street everybody was going to disrespect [sic] her. She was going to be teased by other children.”

“If people do crime you can't see their face. But you often see the face of the innocent children. They were supposed to protect and respect the face of a child.”

STOP ADVERTISING ALCOHOL.

The use of language is an integral part of reporting. It can be used to convey respect for children and empower them, it can be graphic and disturbing, patronising, derogatory and in some cases dehumanising. During the monitoring period a child in a sexual abuse case was reported as being forced to have sex with a dog. In some cases she was referred to as a “dog-sex-girl.” This type of language further victimises the child and disrespectfully labels her. In addressing the way children are reported, it is critical to address the way language is used.

The South African legal framework

The South African Constitution of 1996 (Bill of Rights, section 28) sets out a broad, rights-based framework governing all other laws and public policies, and protecting citizens. The Bill of Rights states that every child has the right:

- To a name and nationality from birth;
- To family care or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment;
- To basic nutrition, shelter, basic health and social services;
- To be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation;
- To be protected from exploitative labour practices;
- Not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that are:
 - Inappropriate for a person of the child’s age; or
 - Place at risk the child’s well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development;

- Not to be detained except as a measure of last resort, in which case, in addition to the rights a child enjoys under sections 12 and 35 (relating to freedom and security of the person and the rights of arrested, detained or accused persons), the child may be detained only for the shortest appropriate period of time and the right to:
 - Be kept separately from detained persons over the age of 18 years
 - Be treated in a manner, and kept in conditions that take account of the child's age
 - Have a legal practitioner assigned to the child by the state, and at the state's expense, in civil proceedings affecting the child, if substantial injustice would otherwise result;
- Not to be used in armed conflict, and to be protected in times of armed conflict.

The Child Care Act (No. 74 of 1983) stipulates that:

- No person shall publish information relating to children's court proceedings;
- The identity of the child involved shall not be revealed;
- Publicity should serve the interests of the child; and
- Information provided must be approved by the minister/ commissioner.

The Criminal Procedure Act (51 of 1977) section 154 (3) states, "No person shall publish in any manner whatever information which reveals or may reveal the identity of the accused under the age of 18 years or of a witness at criminal proceedings who is under the age of 18 years."

Criminal proceedings refer to the moment a charge has been laid or when it is clear that a crime involving a child has been committed. Identification refers to identity revealed directly or by 'reasonable inference.'

International legal frameworks

The international Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by almost every country since 1989 (including South Africa), sets out specific provisions protecting the rights of children and minors under 18 years. The Convention fits into the broad ambit of international human rights frameworks, including the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Convention identifies specific responsibilities for the media and states the “States parties recognise the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the protection of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health.” (Article 17)

The Convention further states that children have the right to

- Protection against all forms of discrimination, irrespective of the child’s (or parents/guardian) race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Article 2);
- Primary consideration of the best interests of the child at all times (Article 3);
- Protect their identity, including their name and family relations, without interference (Article 8);
- Express their views and opinions, and have these taken seriously according to their age and maturity (Article 12);
- Freedom of expression, including the right to receive and impart information (Article 13);
- Freedom of thought, expression, conscience and religion (Article 14);
- Protection from unlawful interference in the privacy of home, correspondence or attacks on their reputation (Article 16); and
- Protection of their dignity, even if accused of or found guilty of a crime (Article 40).

Tips for journalists and editors

To improve the profile and representation of children in the media, reporters can;

- Include a greater number of stories on or about children;
- Address imbalances by reflecting children in their diversity of race, religion, culture and sex;
- Broaden the representation of children by showing them in their many different roles;
- Access children's opinions where possible;
- Only identify a child when it is in the child's best interests to do so;
- Use language that promotes children's rights to dignity and respect;
- Empower by educating people/children about children's rights;
- Try and promote the best interests of children when reporting on or about them.

Additional resources

The MMP and UNICEF have recently published a handbook, "All sides of the story", for journalists reporting on children. Contact the MMP to obtain a copy.

Website references:

www.sn.apc.org/mmp	Media Monitoring Project
www.rb.se	Save the Children Sweden
www.unicef.org	UNICEF
www.gov.za	SA government
www.polity.org.za	Index of government websites
www.savethechildren.net	International Save the Children Alliance
www.crin.org	Child Rights Information Network
www.soulcity.org.za	Soul City
www.hrw.org	Human Rights Watch
web.uct.ac.za/depts/ci	Children's Institute
www.childrenfirst.org.za	Children First

BAD NEWS



Mother of another
dead
child.
Administration



or/br

ABSLUT

Children

Empowering Children & Media is produced by the Media Monitoring Project

Empowering Children & Media is a joint initiative undertaken by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP), Save the Children Sweden and UNICEF. This booklet is part of a comprehensive campaign aimed at improving the representation of children and children's rights in the media.

MMP is an independent non-governmental organisation, monitoring the media since 1993. The MMP advocates for a fair, accurate and balanced media, and for the communication of information within a framework that respects and upholds human rights.

MMP has extensive experience in monitoring the media, including print, television, radio and electronic media in South Africa. MMP has investigated a range of relevant social and political issues including the media's representation of elections, race, gender, children and HIV/AIDS. MMP has worked with a diversity of partners including the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), Gender Advocacy Project (GAP), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), Peri-natal HIV Research Unit, Wits University Graduate School of Journalism, the Children's Institute and Glacherty and Associates.

The MMP further contributes to the development of media-related public policy through regular submissions to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications and other statutory bodies. MMP is also regularly sourced in the media for expert opinion and analysis. Lastly, the MMP works with training institutions, including the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism(IAJ), to enhance the capacity of journalists, editors and media practitioners.

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