

# CHILD

## PROTECTION & TRAFFICKING

Is the media telling the right(s) story?



3 March 2011

Radio Documentary  
Launch & Discussion

## SUMMARY REPORT



THE DAILY MAVERICK



## “Child Protection and Trafficking: Is the media telling the right story?”

*Human Trafficking: Is the Media Telling the Right(s)* story is a radio documentary that explored the hysteria around human trafficking and the World Cup and whether the way in which the story was told helped or hindered efforts to tackle modern slavery in South Africa. The documentary was produced by two of MMA’s child journalists Khuma Baduza & Khotso Zinhle, who uncovered harsh truths around the fickle nature of donor funding, inflated and unsubstantiated figures, the media’s pack mentality and how modern slavery is hard to sell, while hidden from view the stories of real victims went untold.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, an audience gathered at the Bioscope on Fox Street in Johannesburg for the first exclusive airing of the documentary. Among those present were current and former members of the police, government representatives, journalists, editors, academics, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) employees and those working with trafficked victims. Not only was this an opportunity for these key stakeholders to experience an insightful piece of radio journalism, but it also provided a rare opportunity for a such a diverse range of influential parties to further discuss the issues it raised.

Etv presenter Jeremy Maggs was the Master of Ceremonies and began the day’s proceedings by quoting a statement that he had just found that morning online, regarding the expected increase in exploitation and trafficking of people in Brazil for the 2014 World Cup. He said it was an interesting reflection on the type of communication that came out before the World Cup here in South Africa last year adding that “often when we report on the issue, it tends to be quite sensational.”

Our two child journalists Khuma Baduza & Khotso Zinhle, who worked on the documentary, then introduced the report, stating the challenges they had faced and their key messages:

### **The Challenges:**

Media and NGOs appeared to have been fighting against each other, saying different and frequently competing things, instead of thinking about the children. As a result it was quite hard to find the real story, and not to go down rabbit holes

### **Their Key message:**

They want everyone to know what human trafficking is. They expressed their view that media is supposed to tell the story for the children, and if the media and NGOs cannot work together, then important stories will remain untold.

**“Media need to stop being lazy and give Google a rest”- Khotso Zinhle**



**Playing of the documentary followed by panel discussion involving the following guests:**

*Ray White* - Senior News Anchor, Eyewitness News

*Phillip de Wet* - Deputy Editor, The Daily Maverick

*Diane Hall* - Johannesburg Director, Justice ACTS

*Babalwa Makawula* - Project Manager, New Life Center

### **Clear and present tension**

The discussion began and developed around the reporting of the issue before and during the World Cup. Initial thoughts and insights from both the media and NGO panellists confirmed what had emerged from the documentary about ongoing confusion around the issue. The documentary concluded that in many respects the right(s) story regarding human trafficking and the bigger picture of child protection had been missed, despite extensive coverage around the World Cup.

***Comments were made from both sides giving credence to the idea that media and NGO's got elements of the "story" wrong, and that while specific NGO's played a role in putting the wrong message out, the media who reported these figures got it wrong in turn.*** It was observed that some within the media reported on the issue and the projected figures in relation to it, without doing any in-depth verification. What also emerged was that NGO's differed in their approach to how they communicated the issue, and what messages they disseminated regarding it.

Diane Hall, from Justice ACTS Johannesburg, said that the documentary revealed many conflicting messages regarding how the issue had been reported. She continued that it was clear that both NGO's and journalists got it wrong but cautioned against playing the blame game. Instead she stressed her desire to figure out how to move forward so that this issue can be reported more effectively in the media, in order to bring about a reflection of the true human elements involved. Diane and others also applauded the media for their role in bringing about increased awareness to the broader public of the term 'human trafficking', but pointed out that a misunderstanding of the issue cannot further efforts to confront it.

The media panelists expressed the view that receiving mixed messages and confused communications from NGO's puts them in a difficult situation because they as media often turn to NGO's for their expert information for their reports. From the documentary it was clear that the media reported on what they heard, and herein lay the central theme of tension. Errors in the messages communicated by certain NGO's influenced media's reporting on the issue, and led to the confusion and misunderstanding revealed in the documentary.



As the World Cup was such a singularly landmark event in South Africa, it was described by panellist Ray White, of Eye Witness News as something that brought with it many uncertainties for the South African public, as well as for media and press. Ray made the point that this was especially the case regarding the issue of human trafficking, and that the country had no idea what to expect or what was going to happen. Human trafficking was suddenly being thrown onto the World Cup platform, and fears linking the two were communicated by NGOs and in turn by the media.

### **An issue of trust: Accusations and defence**

On the allegation that media hyped up the issue prior to the World Cup, Phillip De Wet of The Daily Maverick was adamant his media outlet played no part in it. “We didn’t hype it up. We at the Daily Maverick have never run a human trafficking story ever.” He further stated that out of all the stories happening during the World Cup, it was not one of the stories his paper thought important (though others clearly did). It was Phillip’s view that this is not an easy story for a paper to tell, as it involves elements of an embarrassingly sexual nature, and to get people genuinely interested in it is an uphill battle. To this end he argued that one of the only angles to use is that of the sensational sexual slavery one. Phillip then aimed his statements at the NGO representatives present stating: “You need to convince us that this is a story that we need to tell. You need to convince the people that this is a story they need to focus on.” hereby putting responsibility back in the hands of the NGO’s, further questioning them on how they make this story interesting and asking “What can your NGO do?”

Babalwa Makawula from New Life Centre acknowledged that as an NGO they need to work hand in hand with the media to tell the story, but that journalists and editors need to be sensitised, to be able to tell the stories of the victims. Babalwa added that while NGO’s want to tell the story, there is an issue of mistrust, as there is a belief that the media often exaggerate in order to sell a story. Nevertheless Babalwa acknowledged that NGO’s need media’s help in order to create awareness.

About the relationship between media and NGO’s Ray White emphasised that the two will never “walk hand in hand.” ***He went on to make the point that in his view the one thing that the news is not is “fair”: “It’s not right, it’s not wrong, but it isn’t fair”.*** Ray added that journalists and editors want and need what’s termed as “hard news”. In the case of Eyewitness News this was motivated by a need to ensure that people will listen and not tune in to another station. “If they [media] did not report hard news people wouldn’t listen and then what’s the point?” he asked.



Diane Hall countered that they were not asking the media to “walk hand in hand into the sunset”, or even that they wanted the media to report on every story; but stressed that if they were going to report on a story, then to cover it accurately and in a sensitive manner, that they “do it right”. She said getting the right message out was crucial to really making people aware of the issue and its complexities. Diane gave an example of a story, where a victims name is used. This, she said can cause untold amounts of problems not only for the victim but for all involved in that case.

One of the documentary makers, Khumo Baduza interjected to ask **“why can’t the media go to the NGO’s to get the story, so that they can get it right and not wrong?”** Jeremy Maggs added a further question: “What can the media do better and how can the story be worked more effectively?”

Phillip’s response to these questions was honest. He said that one of the fundamental problems is trust between NGOs and the Media. **“We cannot trust figures from NGOs as they are players in the game. You [NGO’s] need money, and anything you can do to get it will be part of your strategy.”** He further said that for media this is a complicated issue, and simply sorting through all the fundamentals involved in the greater story takes more resources which we do not have.

Of the NGO’s Jeremy asked whether or not they inflate the issue to make more money?

In relation to her organisation, Babalwa responded with a resounding “No!” Our goals are to help our communities, and these things are real. Of course we need money but we want people to be really interested in helping.” Diane included her perspective saying that while she can’t speak for all or any other NGO’s, at Justice ACTs Jo’burg, they have not received any funding since beginning their work, and were rather using their own resources.

On the emphasis put on the issue of trafficking around the World Cup the point was made that people were talking about the numbers of victims who would be trafficked into the country, and so these figures formed the basis for the coverage. And while these figures are now seriously disputed they were the “story” at the time. A lawyer in the audience, who identified herself as working in the sphere of development, identified what she saw to be a contradiction in what was being said. She put it to Jeremy Maggs and the media panellists that “you say that you are responsible media and report facts, yet you say now that you do not know where the figures were pulled from. Yet you were quite happy to put the figures in the media without verifying them. This is just journalists regurgitating info they got from someone else. How can you say then that you only report facts and check your sources?”



## The way of the media: A never ending cycle

“Private newsrooms comprise of journalists with their own stories which they have to go after,” Phillip commented, “We have to do what we have to do in a day to get stories out. We check our sources. But admittedly we get it wrong at times.”

Jeremy interjected saying ***“We [the media] practice telephone journalism. The point about journalists being lazy is quite right.”***

Additionally the media panellists made the point that the media only report on things of interest to its readers, listeners or viewers and human trafficking didn't appear to be one of those things off interest. However this perhaps overlooks the fact that it clearly was an issue of interest around the World Cup. For reasons outlined in the documentary, including unknowns around the world cup, international donor funding for trafficking projects linked to event and media's pack mentality, information, some of which was inaccurate, was made easily accessible for the media. In the run up to the World Cup some media chose to run with what was being said by someone else, rather than looking themselves into the issue in order to report the reality of it.

Speaking to the audience, Phillip said “When we [the media] get something wrong, we need you [NGO's/citizens] to go the media and tell them that they got it wrong.”

It became clear that the NGO's had a different idea of the role of media than the media had of themselves. A clear common thread from the NGOs present was their need for a media that is sincerely interested in reporting these issues, and representatives voiced their desire to help the media tell the stories of human trafficking. NGO representatives also expressed the need for sensitisation rather than sensationalism; stressing the lack of trust that exists, and highlighting the complexities involved in working with, and indeed reporting on, victims of trafficking.

Examining the issue of whether reporters were getting the tone right in trafficking stories, Phillip de Wet queried whether the public would care about the issue if journalists didn't go into graphic detail?

Babalwa Makawula raised the point that the very nature of trafficking leads many victims to feel as if becoming a victim was their own fault. Babalwa suggested that if more research was done, and journalists investigated in more depth it could lead to a greater understanding of the nuances and complexities of trafficking by the public and indeed by trafficked victims themselves. Babalwa also pointed out that the tone of articles written on the issue can suggest that a victim of trafficking is 'a sex worker' which suggests choice rather than entrapment. She said that too few articles took the time to examine what a woman, who is forced to sell her body, has gone through, and how she became enslaved.



It fell to young journalist Khumo Baduza to point out that ***“trafficking isn’t always about being sexually exploited, there are other reasons why children are trafficked”***, and asked “we as the children want to know who is going to tell our stories?”

A member of the audience, who identified herself as Khumo’s mother suggested to the panel that media has a responsibility to raise the moral fibre of a country, and that just reporting graphic detail on horrible things doesn’t help to do that.

Summing up the crux of the debate, MC Jeremy Maggs asked “Whose problem is it?”

The media panellists made the point that people don’t want to read stories all the time about trafficking, be they stories of missing girls, or stories of rescues, and that issues have a shelf life. This raised the point of issue fatigue, which is not only confined to the issue of human trafficking but to almost everything.

It was raised in the discussion that recently EWN (Eye Witness News), represented on the panel by Ray White, reported on the trafficking of women from Northern Cape to Cape Town. However the report itself failed to identify the crime in question as that of human trafficking. For this they received a “CHUMP” from MMA, which explained how this failure served to perpetuate a continued misunderstanding of human trafficking in South Africa. Ray White explained that the issue was brought to their journalist’s attention by the Vice Squad in Cape Town, who had made no mention of the phrase human trafficking. Their journalists in turn communicated what had been presented to them. This was a clear indication to the lack of general awareness around the issue, and a reluctance to identify human trafficking as what it is, unless someone else does it first.

## **Beyond the safe-house: Communication**

Both media and NGO’s clearly had their differing views on the role of the media. What came out from the discussion, and was in a sense clarified for many of the NGO members present were some of the issues involved in how the media works. The media representatives on the panel generally defended their industry, stating their views that the media needs a sellable story to tell, in order for people to be interested, and to buy their newspapers or listen to their station. Which begged the question: What is a sellable story?

Phillip de Wet of The Daily Maverick suggested that ***“You [NGO’s] want us [the media] to report on human trafficking so that people will care. People don’t care. We say get people to care and then we will report on it”***.

One then has to examine how or why the people cared enough around the World Cup for human trafficking to be covered so extensively at the time. It appeared from the discussion that the answer was a combination of readily available information, despite its questionable accuracy, and circumstances that supported the sensational, for example a big event teamed with a fear of the unknown.

Arguably then in the run up to the World Cup some NGOs succeeded in making people 'care' about human trafficking with large figures and scary stories. The result was sensational reporting, however these ultimately contributed to fatigue and even doubt around the importance of the issue as people realised that the reality looked very different from the story they were sold. Tens of thousands of girls were not imported into Africa as sex slaves, instead before, during and after the World Cup vulnerable women and girls were and are entrapped in South African communities, in a way that is much more subtle.

The outstanding question that was raised at the discussion was ***how, in the absence of sensationalism, NGO's, advocacy groups, or indeed journalists can put this story back on the agenda, or at least get the odd sensitively told story in print.***

A member of the audience who works with Oasis trust in Diepsloot said to the panellists that all they were asking was for the media to meet them half-way: "We have the stories; we need the media to tell them."

Jeremy Maggs replied that media can only do a story so many times before it is devalued. Ray White agreed that "it is the currency of the story. That is the problem."

Phillip de Wet asked whether NGOs were telling your own stories - and gave the example that only journalists were tweeting about the event.

Here the issue of NGO resources emerged. Diane Hall explained that the Johannesburg Justice ACTS team consists of just two people, and that they do not have the time to be journalists while also rescuing victims of human trafficking.

Nevertheless a number of NGO representatives present agreed that they had to work harder to improve their efforts to keep the issue alive. They agreed that keeping the issue on the agenda is vital to their continuing efforts to combat human trafficking which is not even comprehensively legislated for in South African. Among the areas that needed to be addressed according to those NGOs present included accumulating reliable data and working on the messages they needed to communicate, to encourage a broader and more meaningful interest in the issue, so that the media would have a clear motivation to report on it.





## Some thought provoking insights from the debate

### **Marcelle (UNISA Criminology):**

The discussion needs to be confined to human trafficking [and not mixed up with prostitution]. There is a moral obligation for all people. We need to educate ourselves on the dynamics of the issue and our moral obligation. It's crucially important that the media and the police need to work hand in hand on these issues. Victims have been murdered for speaking with media. Traffickers merely eliminate the 'commodity' that the victim becomes. Cases are very sensitive. People need to be educated on the comprehensive definition of human trafficking.

### **Ineke (US Embassy):**

You [the media] say that the issue isn't interesting enough? But isn't this issue just the tip of the iceberg, of a huge story, like the rate of rape and abuse, hunger and poverty etc?

### **Diane:**

Today has been beneficial to all of us. We've heard a lot, and I would say let's just all be more responsible, in each of the individual elements we're playing in this.

### **Babalwa:**

Let's find a way of working together, and a way of helping our communities and our country to tell the story. Let's try to raise greater awareness - and we need the media to help us with this.

### **Ray:**

We [as the journalists] are also humans. We also don't want human trafficking. So speak to us and the police.

### **Phillip:**

It is in your [NGOs] power to swing the balance.

### **Child Journalists, Khumo & Khotso:**

The Child Journalists raised their very perceptive and valuable points and insights throughout the discussion. Jeremy Maggs commenting at the end, that they [Khumo & Khotso] were possibly the ones who had the best handle on the topic out of everyone in the room. The most prominent of their comments were certainly that if the media are not willing to tell children's stories, then who will? And additionally, that while NGO's wanted to get the word out, they were limited in their ability to do so, that the media have the ability to be more far reaching than any one NGO can be, so the media are crucial to educate and bring awareness of this and other issues that affect children.



## Post launch comments from MMA

### **Media:**

Is it not the media's role to inform the citizens of issues about which they may otherwise be unaware?

Why does a story need to be something people want to hear about in order for media (especially news media) to report on it? Surely the media are not supposed to feed people simply what they want to hear. Wouldn't this be the same as for instance a media which only reports what the government want them to report in a state which had no free media? Threats to free speech generate fierce opposition, and justifiably so. But by having citizens dictate to the media what should be in the news is surely absurd in the same way.

### **NGOs:**

In the case of NGOs who are advocating for their cause, perhaps the most crucial lesson is to campaign with accurate information, otherwise they risk discrediting their cause. They are also challenged to help people care about the issue, without being tempted into a cycle of sensationalism.

### **Everyone:**

For all parties, there is a need for each to recognise that organisations and individuals often come to an issue with some sort of agenda – in the case of the media, its to sell papers, for the NGOs its to raise awareness about their issue above everything else – and that the road to imparting empowering information lies somewhere in between.