

Voices

92 million

The increase in the number of people living on less than \$1 a day in sub-Saharan African between 1995 and 2005. – World Bank

More than a billion people still live in extreme poverty a decade after world leaders endorsed the eight Millennium Development Goals illustrated above || GRAPHIC: ANTON VERMUELEN

A delicate balance is the media challenge



Tempting though it may be, the ANC dare not impose a media tribunal. It is a fact that if we closely examine the ethical and investigative standards of many newspaper stories the idea could be very enticing – and not only to the ANC. For example, some stories on former presidents Thabo Mbeki and Kgalema Motlanthe and some on the current president, Jacob Zuma, would undoubtedly fall into that category.

It appears the need for a tribunal began to take root more seriously in the ANC around the time when Motlanthe – then president after Mbeki was recalled – was wrongly, unfairly and scandalously slandered by Independent Group newspapers.

When the “24-year-old” in question – whom Motlanthe was alleged to have impregnated as a result of an illicit affair – told them she only said what they “wanted to hear”, all the papers did was allocate tiny spaces at the bottom of the second and third pages for an apology. But when the fabricated stories broke they were splashed across their front pages.

A case of the wanton abuse of editorial power? Absolutely so, especially since this concerned the president at the time. ANC stalwart Jesse Duarte was right when she pointed out to me that no previous president in this country had to endure such invasive and sustained personal and political embarrassment as a result of a string of blatant lies and fabrications.

A study of those stories will show the most unethical journalism one can imagine. It is worse when enquiry seems to suggest that underlying this case was a political agenda, apparently orchestrated within the top leadership of the ANC, to discredit Motlanthe in the run-up to last year's election – no matter at what cost to the dignity and integrity of the president, his office and his family.

The idea of a tribunal has even been supported by ordinary newspaper readers in the public debates which it has sparked. Readers don't have to be ANC members or supporters to discern, surmise or believe – based on what they read over a period – that the person targeted in a story has been unfairly or unjustly treated.

On the other hand, was it not for excellent investigative journalism we would not have discovered multiple wrongdoings in both the state and private sector. The ANC might only be persuaded to abandon the idea of the tribunal if a very firm commitment to a comprehensive review of the powers, role and resources of the press ombudsman and the press council is made in order to seriously strengthen self-regulation to such a degree that it inspires confidence. This has not, unfortunately, been the case thus far.

But I have a sense that the main aim of the more far-sighted ANC leaders was not to impose a statutory tribunal on the media industry but to get them so scared by the threat and consequences of having one that they would scurry to review and strengthen the notion, practice and institutions of self-regulation.

A far greater degree of editorial responsibility, sensitivity and unbiased professionalism is imperative but not to be so cautious that the purpose of a vigorous and vibrant media is defeated. To strike that delicate balance is the media's biggest challenge now. Harvey is writing the authorised biography of Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe

Elusive common wealth

Leaders to meet next month to assess progress on millennium development goals

Dayaram expected to hold his baby in his arms. Instead, he was left to mourn his wife and unborn child. They died of complications during labour because Dayaram's wife, Bushba, had to walk 50km from her remote village in northern India to the nearest hospital. Bushba's fate is not exceptional.



the violations of human rights from which poverty and exclusion almost invariably stem.

According to current World Bank estimates, more than 1.4 billion people live in extreme poverty.

In sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, poverty remains stubbornly high. The number of persons living below \$1 a day went up by 92 million in sub-Saharan Africa and by eight million in Western Asia between 1990 and 2005.

In many countries, hundreds of pregnant rural women like Bushba die unnecessarily because of a lack of accessible medical care. Mater-

nal health is a human rights concern. Indeed, implicit in the MDGs is the concern that all people should be able to meet their basic human rights – the right to food, shelter, education, to obtain remedies when their rights are violated, and to participate in public life.

The interrelation between freedom from want and freedom from fear is made explicit by the UN Charter and by international human rights law. It must also be regarded as a central tenet of discussions on the MDGs.

Such discussions are awaited with a mix of expectations and apprehension because positive change still eludes millions.

We cannot afford to keep disappointing the hopes of those who live on the margins of their own societies. Their disenfranchisement may carry a higher cost than investing resources and political will in their empowerment.

And empowerment cannot be

achieved if development policies are pursued in a human rights vacuum. Yet, for too long, governments have considered human rights and development to be two separate issues.

Economic development has been the overriding concern but, in combination with human rights, economic growth strategies can be a powerful tool to help us realise the UN Charter's vision of a more equal, secure and just world.

Human rights principles such as equality, participation, accountability and the rule of law are instrumental for development to take firm root and to be both equitable and sustainable.

Freedom and participation, and all other civil and political rights, bolster the common wealth of societies.

In turn, social and economic rights are critical to empower an informed polity to count and be counted, as well as to devise

effective development policies.

And gender equality is the biggest development multiplier, known to work everywhere.

I am convinced Bushba and many of the estimated 500 000 women who die every year during pregnancy and childbirth would live and even prosper if, in addition to medical care, they were given a chance to educate themselves, to access information and to participate in the decisions about their pregnancies and how to deliver their children.

Development cannot be a project imposed on people; it must be a common journey led by the people themselves.

A human rights approach to development is essential as it puts people in control of their lives.

It's too late for Bushba, but for many people who can still be saved, time is running out.

» Pillay is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Horn of Africa needs an internal hero



Somalia once again made headlines this week when al-Shabaab militants killed 31 people at a Mogadishu hotel. But, “Somalia”, as seen on the map, simply doesn't exist. There is Southern Somalia, the Federal State of Puntland to the north-east, and the Republic of Somaliland on the northwestern flank.

This is a region that, for decades, has been associated with internecine conflicts, religious extremism and famine.

The larger part of Southern Somalia is in the hands of al-Shabaab, which is implicated in two recent terrorist bombings in Kampala, Uganda.

Of the three, only Somaliland is relatively stable after successful elections in June.

“Somalia” and its problems have become the veritable poster boy for the disintegrated African state. The issue has been thrown into sharp relief following the Kampala bombings and the subsequent debate over whether South Africa should send troops to the region.

To answer this question, it would be necessary to look at previous military campaigns by foreign governments into the region. It's a depressing chroni-

Somalia: a land divided



Graphic: ANTON VERMUELEN

cle of failure and disaster.

History is littered with references to failed missions across the Horn. Between 1991 and 1993, a well-trained 37 000-strong UN- and US-backed force came nowhere near defeating warlords. Then there is the latest effort: a push for a 6 300-strong African Union (AU) mission in Somalia, protecting the transitional federal government along its paltry 4km territory.

So why is the UN Security Council stepping in when it knows past efforts have failed?

Behind the scenes, informed observers are aware that the Bush administration pushed Uganda, Burundi and other countries to go into Mogadishu.

By endorsing this, the Security Council undermined its own obligations, prompting observers such as Ghanaian Colonel Festus Aboagye to ask whether it was a case of African troops being used as “cannon fodder” for vested interests.

Instead of foreign military interventions, one would do well to consider that Somalis – when left to indigenous, home-grown processes – can succeed in implementing grassroots approaches to nation building.

Four years ago, we saw the Union of Islamic Courts bring reasonable stability to Mogadishu until Ethiopian troops pushed them out.

The northeast area of Puntland has a fragile peace

under the vulnerability of huge piracy money and al-Shabaab guerrilla cells, and aspires to be a part of a federal Somalia.

This, after it developed a social pact of nominated elders and clan parliamentary representation in 1998.

But it is Somaliland that has accurately been dubbed Africa's best-kept secret.

In June this year, the region held its second democratic presidential election, which was observed to be free, fair and credible by observers from the US, the UK, Norway and South Africa. To top it all, Somaliland witnessed a continental rarity in the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition candidate, Ahmed Mohamed Silaanyo.

South Africa has an excellent peacekeeping record and one would caution against this being blemished by the rash judgment of some AU “experts”, who now insist that the AU mission in Somalia needs to up its troop levels to 10 000 – a conservative estimate by all accounts.

Ultimately, foreign military interventions should be discouraged. A new internally driven political process is required of all the Southern Somali political groups.

Bringing peace and stability to the Horn is doable and a great chance for Africa to show that it is in control of its own affairs.

» Jhazbhay is an author and professor at the University of South Africa

