

# Africa. Media.



Those are our twin concerns as we move into this new moment in human history which is being called the “Information Society” or the “Information Age”.

While “new”, in that information now has a currency it never seemed to have before in the globalised realm of economics and politics, and also “new”, in that the technology that underpins information is unprecedented in its power and reach, “information” is as old as the human drive to make meaning and has always been crucial to our negotiations of the world we live in.

So we need to have a sense of history, a sense of modesty and a sense of democracy as we contemplate the issues the “Information Age” throws up for us. (To get a little perspective read Juliet Were Oguttu’s remark on the women of Africa who for millennia have kept cultural knowledge safe, page 26.)

It’s amazing how every “new” technology that comes along is embraced with passion, is hailed as a saviour for all human ills, and is seen as full of promise alone.

We constantly forget that as we move forward we humans carry our baggage (visible and invisible) with us, we create out of what we already know – nothing is brand new, we taint what we encounter with who we already are. As Rudy Nadler-Nir points out (on page 46) new spaces are not free of the old discriminations.

And so to the debate before us.

The world process unfolding has some significant holes in it. And they can be summed up in two words: Africa. Media.

Africa: the agenda for discussion cannot be set by those who have always been in power. Exclusion by default cannot continue to be the way the conversation happens. This summit was proposed as necessary for the world by the country of Tunisia and set in motion by African concerns, it will go through Geneva and come back to Tunis. It should truly be a “Summit with Two Peaks” (in the words of Alain Modoux, the consultant to the Swiss WSIS delegate). Africa-Europe-Africa – with the concerns of the world’s usually excluded seriously on the agenda.

Media: how is it possible that in the media-saturated world we live in, that this dimension of our lives does not immediately echo when we say “information”? Media in all its facets is crucial for the “Information Society”, but more than this media is crucial for development and crucial for democracy, hence crucial for Africa. And this is borne out by the many stories we carry in this Review of innovative and extraordinary people using media all over this continent for change and progress.

So if you are involved in debates in the ongoing WSIS process or merely doing your job as a media worker engaged in reporting ICTs, keep these two words ringing in your mind.

Africa. Media.