CONFERENCE REPORT

CTRL + J AFRICA

Tech and Journalism in the Global South

September 3-5, 2025
Johannesburg, South Africa

The CTRL+J Africa conference was hosted in Johannesburg, South Africa from September 3-5, 2025 by the Media Leadership Think Tank at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM). The event was sponsored by IFPIM and Luminate.

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Rapporteuring and report preparation by ALT Advisory.

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Introduction ++

The CTRL+J Africa: Tech and Journalism in the Global South Conference took place from 3–5 September 2025 at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) in Johannesburg. Convened by the Media Leadership Think Tank (MLTT) in partnership with the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), the gathering brought together 120 participants from 21 countries, with 41 of the 46 speakers from Africa, joined by strong delegations from Brazil and Indonesia. Regulators, civil society, lawyers, publishers, journalists, government representatives, global digital platforms, and newsfluencers met to test ideas and confront difficult trade-offs.

The conference built on established momentum. In the same GIBS venue in 2023, participants from across the world, predominantly from the Global South, adopted the Principles for Fair Compensation between journalism and technology companies. Efforts to build cross-border learning and collaboration in the Global South gained traction with the launch of the CTRL+J series in 2025. Building on the rich conversations at CTRL+J Latam in São Paulo in March and CTRL+J APAC in Jakarta in July, CTRL+J Africa marked the third regional event in this tricontinental collaboration, which will culminate at the upcoming CTRL+J International conference in Kuala Lumpur in November 2025.

The timing mattered: CTRL+J Africa formed part of

> "CTRL+J is about digging deeper. No one ever said this would be easy but through collaboration, debate, and solidarity, we hope we can move closer to our core objective, which is to protect and sustain public interest journalism as a bedrock of democracy" – *Michael Markovitz,*
> *– Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS*

Johannesburg's Future of Journalism Week and followed the Media20 Summit on 1–2 September, creating a window of opportunity to collectively examine the challenges facing the industry and renew commitments and priorities to sustain journalism as a public good.

Hosting in South Africa carried practical and symbolic weight. Local media operate under intense financial strain, but the policy environment is moving. The Competition Commission's provisional report on the Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry (MDMPI) has opened concrete pathways for rights-based regulation and platform accountability. Meanwhile, civil society initiatives, including the Association of Independent Publishers-driven Digital News Transformation Fund,

are testing shared infrastructure and funding models. CTRL+J Africa brought together these emerging solutions, linking regulatory options, philanthropic strategies and industry practice to move from diagnosis to implementable action.

Moving beyond discussions on narrow fixes, sessions explored how technological disruption, shrinking civic space and fragile media economies intersect across African contexts. The conversations surfaced leverage points where policy can change incentives, collaboration can unlock scale, and funding can guarantee independence and effectiveness.

Several features made this gathering distinct within the CTRL+J series. Under Chatham House rules, Google and Meta participated in robust exchanges on fair compensation, data access, transparency, and accountability. Separately, government representatives from South Africa, Brazil and Indonesia explored alignment on regulation of emerging technology and AI, and competition tools. These engagements reflected a maturing conversation in which African institutions are moving from reactive participation to proactive agenda-setting, coordinated with partners in Latin America and Asia-Pacific.

The discussions underscored several central themes:

1. Digital sovereignty begins with reclaiming ownership over narratives and data.

2. Rights-based regulation is a necessary foundation for platform accountability. Voluntary measures are insufficient; enforceable frameworks grounded in competition law, human rights, and access to information are required to secure fair value, transparency, and due process.

3. Journalism's resilience depends on diversified revenue and shared infrastructure, with cooperation between large and small publishers to reduce duplication and widen reach while protecting editorial independence.

The conference recognised the centrality of independent and community media in sustaining public trust, particularly in vernacular contexts, and the role of youth and content creators in reshaping civic participation. These constituencies are essential to an inclusive information ecosystem that can resist propaganda, surveillance, and disinformation. The economic costs of compromised information spaces were addressed alongside democratic harms, reinforcing the case for credible, fact-based public interest reporting as an both economic and social good.

Artificial intelligence emerged as both a risk and an opportunity across many sessions. Participants stressed that AI governance must be holistic and globally representative, with African voices present in the design and oversight. With thousands of African languages largely invisible to mainstream systems, communities and institutions must help build datasets, models and governance frameworks that reflect local realities and protect fundamental rights. This is a question of power, dignity and participation in the digital economy.

Johannesburg proved a fitting host — a city of resilience and inequality, innovation and scarcity, where the contradictions of the media environment are visible. For a few days in September, it became a centre of gravity for debates about journalism's future that reach far beyond national borders. The tone was deliberately pragmatic: participants challenged easy optimism and demanded specificity over rhetoric.

This introduction sets the stage for the detailed account that follows. The next sections document proceedings and surface insights and proposals. The concluding section sets out the key takeaways and next steps. Taken together, they reflect a proposition tested in Johannesburg: that through coordinated policy, enforceable regulation, diversified funding, and purposeful alliances across the Global South, it is possible to build information ecosystems that serve democratic aspirations and the public interest.

Acknowledgments ++

The success of the CTRL+J Africa conference was made possible through the collaborative efforts of many individuals and organisations whose contributions we gratefully acknowledge.

The MLTT and IFPIM would like to recognise our coalition partners, Momentum Journalism and Tech Task Force and the Indonesian Cyber Media Association (AMSI) whose support and shared commitment to strengthening public interest media across the global south helped shape the vision and impact of the conference.

The conference report was prepared by ALT Advisory and reviewed and edited by Michael Markovitz, Ompha Tshamano, Irene Jay Liu, Jessica White, and Nkirote Koome.

Much appreciation to IFPIM's Makmid Kamara, Khadija Patel, Trinna Leong for their work behind the scenes in support of the CTRL+J Africa.

We extend our special thanks to the Honourable Commissioner Ourveena Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for her gracious welcome remarks and continued leadership in promoting freedom of expression across the continent.

We also recognise the invaluable support of our service partners:

▸ The entire GIBS events team (conferencing and accommodation)

▸ Multi-media (AV and production services)

▸ Pink Mosquito (travel and logistics)

▸ Rising Sun Creative (photography)

▸ The Wild (branding and design)

Finally, we extend our deep appreciation to the speakers and delegates at CTRL+J Africa. Your insights, experiences and engagement enriched the conversations and helped shape the agenda for technology and journalism in the Global South, particularly in Africa.
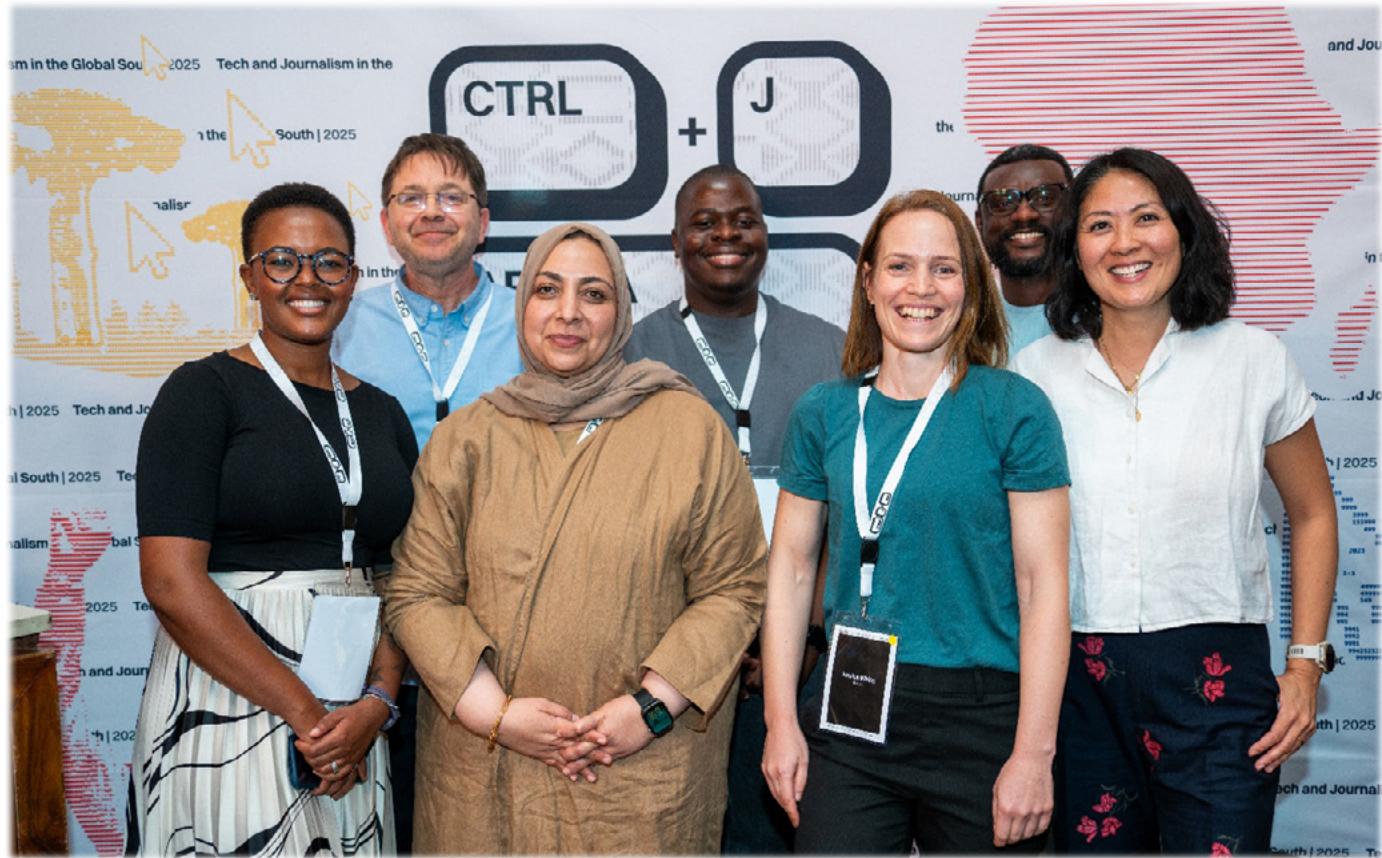
From Left to Right: Nkirote Koome, Khadija Patel, Jessica White, Irene Jay Liu (front row) Michael Markovitz, Ompha Tshamano, Makmid Kamara (back row)

Overview of Discussions ++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

Welcome dinner

Commissioner Ourveena Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, underscored the strategic importance of the conference in advancing press freedom and digital rights. She highlighted the indispensable role of journalists in democratic societies and called for robust policy frameworks and resolutions that protect and expand the space for journalism in an increasingly digitised media landscape.

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DAY 1: Media Sustainability and Democracy

Welcome to CTRL+J Africa & Opening Remarks

▸ **Michael Markovitz** – Director, Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS

▸ **Makmid Kamara** – Director, IFPIM (Africa and the Middle East)

On 4 September 2025, Michael Markovitz opened the CTRL+J Africa Conference by welcoming participants from 13 African countries alongside representatives from a total of 21 countries. He highlighted that 41 out of the 46 speakers on the programme were Africans, reflecting strong African leadership in shaping global discussions on media sustainability, digital regulation, and public interest journalism.

> "This is not only an African moment—
> it is a global moment, with Africa,
> at least for this week, at its centre."
> – Michael Markovitz,
> Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS

Markovitz then reflected on the 2023 adoption of the *Principles for Fair Compensation* and their continuing relevance for fair remuneration of journalism in the Global South. He noted progress since then, including South Africa's Competition Commission market inquiry into digital platforms and parallel regulatory efforts in Nigeria, Kenya, Indonesia, and Brazil.

He highlighted the importance of South–South partnerships, particularly the tri-continental alliance between South Africa, Brazil and Indonesia, supported by IFPIM, as a way to strengthen regional debates and global influence.

Markovitz cautioned against overreliance on philanthropy or the goodwill of companies with histories of anti-competitive behaviour, stressing that sovereign democracies must protect rights and digital sovereignty through policy and regulation. He challenged participants to consider alternatives if not regulation, while underscoring that all solutions must be rights-based and inclusive.

Markovitz reaffirmed that CTRL+J Africa is about collaboration, solidarity, and the difficult but necessary dialogue to sustain journalism as a cornerstone of democracy.

Makmid Kamara, IFPIM's Director of Africa & the Middle East, extended warm greetings on behalf of IFPIM by sharing an African proverb: "A home that welcomes guests and strangers will never lack food," in hopes that CTRL+J Africa would serve to nourish each participant with new knowledge and information.

Kamara emphasised that CTRL+J Africa seeks to interrogate the evolving challenges to journalism in an era that has been marked by technological disruption, shrinking civic space, and fragile media economies across the African continent. He stated that IFPIM's aim for this gathering is to meaningfully contribute to the transcontinental process of amplifying voices and agency of the global majority in broader conversations around media sustainability, corporate tech responsibility and the protection of public interest journalism. Kamara positioned the gathering as a timely opportunity for IFPIM to engage with stakeholders on AI, digital transformation, and journalism. He highlighted the growing role of AI in newsrooms, both for digital transformation and revenue generation, noting that hybrid approaches are now necessary. Kamara highlighted the importance of ethics, human rights, and well-being in the development of AI strategies, referencing the African Union's continental AI strategy.

He concluded by placing people and audiences at the centre of technological and journalistic innovation, emphasising that stakeholders must engage as collaborators, not competitors, and that meaningful change requires collective effort rather than individual action.

KEYNOTE SPEECH: Who Owns the Narrative? Journalism, Digital Sovereignty and Resistance in Africa

> **Nanjira Sambuli** – Non-resident Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Kenya

Nanjira Sambuli's keynote explored the complexities of narratives, media, and digital sovereignty in Africa. She opened by framing her role as one that "complicates the equation," urging participants to engage with uncomfortable and unconventional perspectives while remaining guided by hope.

> "Africa today is still treated as marginal and often even completely absent from dominant imaginations of the global"
> – *Nanjira Sambuli, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Sambuli emphasised that narratives are not neutral; they are exercises of invisible power, shaping who is seen, heard, and included. Drawing on Phumi Mtetwa, she noted that narratives determine access, rights, and survival, a reality acutely felt in how Africa is represented globally. Despite the proliferation of media and AI tools capable of telling African stories, the continent remains marginalised, often defined by external perceptions rather than self-determined narratives.

Reflecting on Kenya's media landscape in 2010–2011, Sambuli highlighted how the rise of blogging and social media disrupted traditional journalism hierarchies. Specifically, Sambuli noted that:

> "One thing that happened then was that blogging and social media came into the spotlight, and they ushered a whole new world of communication and storytelling and even reporting on news and events."

She explained that established media labelled bloggers derogatorily, revealing an "invisibilised" narrative reinforced under the guise of professionalism. Sambuli stressed that biases in communication shape human perception and influence collective understanding, particularly when algorithm-driven social media prioritises metrics and emotional engagement over depth and context.

Sambuli argued that digital sovereignty cannot be achieved without first addressing analogue antecedents and that this requires tackling epistemological injustices embedded in technology. She highlighted the tension between individualistic digital paradigms and African philosophies such as Ubuntu, which prioritise relational wisdom and community.

> "What does it mean for truly owning our narrative if we are almost always reacting?"
> – *Nanjira Sambuli, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Sambuli called for a recalibration of media and tech ecosystems through literacy, imagination, and resistance. She identified three key challenges for CTRL+J Africa to address:

> **Literacy:** Enhancing media, AI, and digital literacy in African contexts, acknowledging strategic illiteracy as a potential form of resistance.

> **Terminology:** Questioning the use of terms like "sub-Saharan Africa" in framing discourse.

> **Visibility:** Addressing the persistent "manholes" in media that obscure African voices.

Sambuli concluded by urging participants to reclaim the power of imagination as a form of resistance and self-determination, emphasising that African communities possess the potential to redefine their narratives and, by extension, the world's understanding of the continent.

> "We are in the digital era, yes, but the concept of sovereignty within which we are operating is completely at odds with our indigenous knowledge systems and what they have to still teach us about our quest for sovereignty." – *Nanjira Sambuli, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*
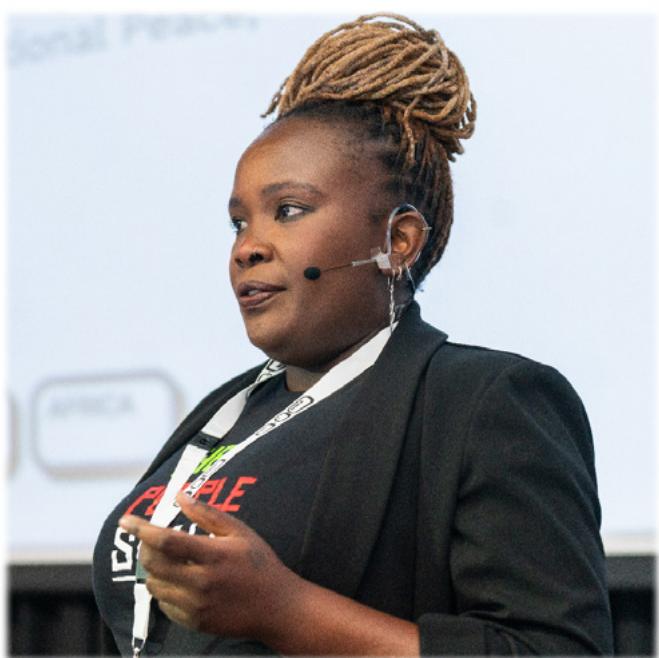
PANEL 1: Tri-Continental Dialogue: CTRL+J Perspectives From Latam, Apac, Africa

Participants:

▸ **Paula Miraglia** – Founder and CEO of Momentum – Journalism & Tech Task Force, Brazil

▸ **Wahyu Dhyatmika** – Chairperson, Asosiasi Media Siber Indonesia, AMSI

▸ **Michael Markovitz** – Director, Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS, South Africa

▸ **Moderated by Irene Jay Liu** – Director, AI, Emerging Tech and Regulation, IFPIM

Key takeaways:

▸ Regional collaboration and solidarity are essential to rebalance negotiations with global platforms.

▸ Narratives shape public perception; advocates must proactively frame regulation as enabling rather than censoring.

▸ Press freedom remains a baseline challenge, particularly in Africa.

▸ Sustainability requires diversified approaches: regulation, philanthropy, public policy, and innovation.

▸ AI poses both risks and opportunities; local initiatives on training data and language models can help reclaim agency.

This dialogue brought together perspectives from Latin America, the Asia-Pacific, and Africa on building sustainable journalism in the face of rapid technological change, platform dominance, and shifting geopolitical realities.

Michael Markovitz opened by describing how the Global South had begun to articulate its own set of principles to guide negotiations, particularly as challenges with early models like Australia's bargaining code began to emerge. Markovitz outlined some of Africa's unique challenges, namely widespread structural inequalities and the fact that only a handful of countries on the continent rank satisfactorily on the press freedom index. He noted that while freedom of expression remains a foundational concern, the Global South cannot wait for ideal conditions before pushing for fairer digital ecosystems. Instead, solidarity across regions, agility in negotiations, and elevating southern perspectives in global forums, such as the African Union, are essential.

From Left to Right: Irene Jay Liu, Paula Miraglia, Wahyu Dhyatmika, Michael Markovitz

> "Work together, find your people. I found mine."
> – Paula Miraglia, Momentum – Journalism & Tech Task Force

Paula Miraglia shared lessons from Latin America, highlighting Brazil's regulatory momentum, including Supreme Court rulings on platform accountability. She urged that a multiplicity of demands should be made in terms of regulation, compensation, licensing, and litigation, arguing that there is no single solution. Narratives, she warned, are critical as opponents frame regulation as censorship, while in reality, regulation can address deep imperfections. Miraglia called for collaboration, better local data, and turning economic relevance into bargaining power. Beyond survival, she pressed the need to *reimagine* journalism in an AI-driven future, and to "find your people" in building resilient alliances. A theme that was continuously supported throughout the CTRL+J Africa Conference.

Wahyu Dhyatmika outlined outcomes from the CTRL+J APAC conference, which gathered 150 participants from 13 countries. Four priority areas emerged: business, technology, news production, and legal frameworks. He noted that the 2024 presidential decree mandating platform negotiations with publishers offered a foundation for fairer terms. Based on research shared by Dhyatmika, 20–30% of news site traffic comes from bots, raising new questions for compensation. He further noted that Indonesia is currently experimenting with local language training models in partnership with publishers, positioning itself to shape AI development.

The discussion also engaged with geopolitics, from BRICS commitments on AI and intellectual property to tensions between press freedom, sovereignty, and copyright. The participants underscored the need for agility, regional solidarity, and government engagement alongside civil society action.

On funding and business models, the participants agreed that philanthropy, regulation, and innovative financing must all play a role. Miraglia suggested blended finance and new product development, including

exploring emerging spaces like gaming, while Markovitz underscored journalism as a public good in need of structural support. Dhyatmika highlighted the importance of ecosystem consolidation to strengthen collective bargaining and effectiveness.

The panel concluded that securing a more equitable media future for the Global South requires collective mobilisation, a reimagining of journalism beyond crisis mode, and the assertion of a Global South perspective.

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From Left to Right: Chris Kabwato, Yvonne Mhango, Daryl Dingley, Dr Kate Skinner, James Smart

PANEL 2: The Cost of Control: Perspective on the Future of Journalism from Africa

Participants:

▸ **Yvonne Mhango** – Africa Economist, Bloomberg, South Africa

▸ **Dr Kate Skinner** – Executive Director, Association of Independent Publishers, South Africa

▸ **Daryl Dingley** – Partner, Webber Wentzel, South Africa

▸ **James Smart** – Managing Editor, Broadcast and New Media, Nation Media Group, Kenya

▸ Moderated by **Chris Kabwato**, Director, Digital Arts Africa, South Africa

The second panel of the day explored the complex dynamics shaping journalism across the African continent. The political economy of media and evolving business and funding models on the continent were considered with the aim of examining the sustainability of journalism in the digital era. As an overarching consideration, the participants in the panel gave critical consideration to who *actually* holds the power within the media space, who funds the news, and ultimately, who pays the price.

> "There still are some difficulties around transparency and what we call the black box."
> – Daryl Dingley, Webber Wentzel

Key takeaways:

‣ Mis/disinformation has tangible economic costs, including reduced GDP and increased borrowing costs.

‣ Independent media enhances transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment.

‣ Platforms have distorted news value and visibility, necessitating regulatory and financial interventions.

‣ Small publishers face severe financial constraints but retain high public trust.

‣ Sustainable funding, collaboration, and digital transformation are essential to securing the future of journalism.

The panel discussion focused on media policy and the evolving structure of media businesses, both in terms of external market forces and internal operational challenges. Central to the conversation was the economic cost of mis- and disinformation, particularly highlighted by **Yvonne Mhango** through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mhango explained how misinformation around vaccines led to varied national responses and stringent regulations, which in turn suppressed the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of countries such as South Africa and Rwanda where hard lockdowns were imposed. Elections were also cited as fertile ground for misinformation, which undermines trust, increases borrowing costs, and disrupts development plans and reform efforts.

The panel then explored the role of independent public interest media in countering these effects. Mhango emphasised that transparency in media fosters investment and reduces perceived risk, while accountability ensures that governments are held responsible for corruption and mismanagement. This, in turn, leads to better utilisation of public resources and empowers citizens to take informed action. When asked about the hidden costs of press freedom, Mhango noted that opaque environments facilitate bribery and corruption, with state capture in South Africa serving as a prime example. Mhango added that investors often use press freedom as a proxy for risk, and in its absence, asymmetric information sharing becomes a barrier to growth.

Daryl Dingley provided insight into the findings of the Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry (MDPMI), which began post-COVID. The panel confirmed longstanding concerns raised by the media industry, including how platforms have reshaped news consumption and created unequal bargaining positions. Algorithms and self-preferencing have marginalised local and community news, while AI-driven search and content agreements have impacted referral traffic. Dingley noted that the MDPMI also highlighted the proliferation of distorted, sensational content from unregulated sources, which, in turn, undermines factual journalism.

Dr Kate Skinner spoke on behalf of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), which represents 200 publications and 160 publishers, many of which operate in underserved rural areas and in all official languages. Skinner noted that the AIP outlets reach 7.4 million South Africans monthly, yet 44% of publishers earn under R100 000 per month, with most running at a loss. Further Skinner highlighted that despite 83% of content being digital, only 6% of revenue comes from digital sources, with print still dominating income. According to Skinner, news publishers rely heavily on platforms like Google, which offer limited support, although 91% of readers trust these publications more than the platforms themselves.

Shared services

On the topic of shared services, Skinner explained the importance of shared infrastructure such as multi-site backups and training programmes. Skinner highlighted that while initial funding from the South African Editors' Forum (SANEF) supported these efforts, sustainable funding is now needed.

James Smart from the Nation Media Group (NMG) reflected on the transformation of media business models post-pandemic. Smart highlighted that after having been previously reliant on print and subscriptions, NMG has had to pivot to digital, integrating newsroom and product teams to better understand audience needs. Smart further shared that the paywall model also currently presents a dilemma, as journalism is both a public good and a business.

A way forward

In discussing a way forward, Mhango proposed several economic reforms to support media sustainability, including diversifying funding sources through philanthropy, advertising, and digital payments. She also advocated for transparency laws and digital rights protections to foster competition. Dingley emphasised that the MDPMI's remedies should be outcomes-based and encouraged collaboration with platforms. He dispelled the myth that mainstream media is self-serving, noting that all media entities face similar financial pressures. Dingley spoke on the growing recognition from platforms of the media's value. He concluded by noting that collective bargaining is gaining momentum but cautioned against regulatory interventions that could lead to prolonged litigation and stressed the importance of commercially backed funding over government-controlled funds.

Skinner introduced the Digital News Transformation Fund (DNTF), which is currently managed by AIP and is designed to support small media outlets. The DNTF aims to test the viability of digital media models and ensure sustainability.

Smart reflected on past government advertising models, which favoured certain media houses and led to instability and noted that moving away from government dependence has allowed media to refocus on public interest journalism, especially in low-trust societies where alignment with government can compromise integrity.

In closing, the participants shared their visions for the future:

▸ Mhango called for sustainable journalism through public-private partnerships and regional frameworks to encourage cross-border collaboration;

▸ Dingley highlighted the need for transparency and targeted funding to uplift smaller entities and promote competition;

▸ Skinner stressed the importance of collaboration, urging small publishers to join SANEF and work with the government; and

▸ Smart concluded by noting that audiences contribute value simply by engaging with paywalled content, and that storytelling must evolve to meet their expectations.

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PANEL 3: Media, Youth and Gender – Voices for a Democratic Future

Provocation by: **Amahle-Imvelo** "Jaxx" Jaxa, CEO of Jaxx of All Trades, South Africa

Amahle-Imvelo "Jaxx" Jaxa shared her personal journey into digital media and political storytelling, illustrating how new platforms are reshaping access to information in South Africa.

She described how her interest in politics and public affairs led her to experiment with short, accessible videos that explained complex issues. A satirical video she released earlier this year about South African soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) went viral, revealing a strong appetite among South Africans for political content delivered in plain language. Building on this, she has since produced content breaking down topics ranging from the national budget to geopolitics, and in just eight months has grown an audience of more than 300 000 followers.

> "When people are informed, they can participate; where they speak, democracy listens."
> – *Jaxx Jaxa, Jaxx of All Trades*

From Left to Right: Ompha Tshamano, Christine Mungai, Lisa Muchangi, Asafika Mpako

Jaxa emphasised that TikTok now has over 150 million users across Africa, demonstrating that young people are not only consuming entertainment but actively seeking new ways to understand politics, culture, and identity. Her approach is rooted in bridging the gap between traditional journalism and the lived realities of citizens by replacing jargon with relatable analogies. With literacy levels and low trust in news posing barriers, she sees her role as making information accessible and empowering democratic participation.

> "My approach is simple – remove complex jargon and use everyday analogies to make politics relatable."
> – Jaxx Jaxa, Jaxx of All Trades

However, she stressed the challenges of sustainability. Most digital creators earn less than $200 a month, and she called for new funding models, partnerships, and recognition of the role that young digital creators play in shaping Africa's democratic landscape.

Jaxa concluded that she does not position herself as a competitor to journalism but as a collaborator, filling gaps left by traditional media and amplifying silenced voices.

Panel discussion:

Panel 3 highlighted how youth and gender-diverse creators are using digital platforms to challenge traditional media narratives, promote inclusion, and showcase their resistance and active participation in building new models of information sharing that supplement Africa's young democratic aspirations.

Participants:

▸ **Lisa Muchangi** – Marketing and Communications Manager, Baraza Media Lab, Kenya

▸ **Christine Mungai** – News Editor, The Continent, Kenya

▸ **Asafika Mpak**o – Communications Coordinator for Southern Africa, Afrobarometer, South Africa

▸ Moderated by **Ompha Tshamano** – Programme & Research Manager, Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS, South Africa

Key takeaways:

▸ Young Africans remain committed to democracy but are deeply disillusioned by unmet promises and structural marginalisation.

▸ Trust and authenticity are driving forces in how youth engage with media and creators.

▸ Innovative journalism models that defy traditional, algorithm-driven approaches show strong audience loyalty.

▸ Collaboration between journalists, creators, and research organisations is essential for amplifying youth and gender-diverse voices.

▸ Sustainability and funding remain critical challenges for both emerging media platforms and youth-led content creation.

Youth, democracy and participation

Asafika Mpako highlighted Afrobarometer's data and findings, which show that while young Africans overwhelmingly prefer democracy to authoritarian alternatives, many are dissatisfied with how it is working in practice. Participation in formal political processes such as voting, party politics, or contacting representatives remains low, with youth more likely to channel their frustrations into protests or social media activism. Structural marginalisation continues to limit young people's influence in institutional politics, underscoring the need for new frameworks that genuinely include youth and gender-diverse voices in democratic processes.

Trust, influence, and media consumption

Lisa Muchangi, from Baraza Media Lab, Kenya, indicated that trust emerged as the key "currency" in today's media landscape amongst young users. Baraza Media Lab's research highlighted that young audiences gravitate toward influencers and creators who present authentic, relatable, and contextually relevant content. This was particularly evident during protests in Kenya, where audiences turned to creators who addressed issues honestly rather than remaining tone-deaf. Journalism, it was argued, could learn from these engagement styles,

valuing creators not just as amplifiers of news but as credible contributors to storytelling.

Innovative journalism models

Christine Mungai shared how *The Continent* has disrupted traditional publishing by choosing WhatsApp as its main distribution channel, reaching tens of thousands of loyal subscribers who actively share content with their networks. By stepping away from algorithm-driven publishing and focusing instead on high-quality, impactful reporting, the publication has cultivated a deeply engaged readership. This model demonstrates that bold, unconventional approaches can strengthen African journalism while resisting the pressures of chasing clicks.

Collaboration and sustainability

Participants highlighted the importance of partnerships in sustaining democratic media ecosystems. Examples included Afrobarometer's collaboration with *The Continent* to amplify citizen voices and the role of creators in making complex issues accessible. At the same time, concerns about sustainability persisted, with calls for new funding models to support youth-led and independent media initiatives. Ultimately, collaboration across sectors, journalists, researchers, creators, and civil society was seen as essential for building inclusive, resilient, and democratic media futures.

FIRESIDE CHAT: Media20 Summit Outcomes: The Way Forward

Participants:

- **Khadija Patel** – Head of Programmes, IFPIM
- **Sbu Ngalwa** – Treasurer General, South Africa National Editors Forum

Key takeaways:

- The M20 is emerging as a vital independent forum advancing information integrity alongside the G20.
- The Johannesburg Declaration underscored commitments to the safety of journalists, the sustainability of media, and the protection of children's rights.
- Collaboration across global, national, and business stakeholders showed strong momentum for supporting press freedom.
- Sustainability and innovation remain pressing concerns, with new models and funding initiatives being tested in South Africa.
- The independence of the M20 allows agenda-setting outside of political capture, but continued local adaptation is essential.

Origins and significance of the M20

Sbu Ngalwa reflected on the origins of the M20, explaining that it began during India's G20 presidency in 2023, when colleagues recognised the need for journalists, media, and civil society to convene and influence the global agenda on information integrity. That first gathering took place virtually, with some members participating remotely. Brazil then built on this momentum, advancing global awareness that reliable and accurate information is not a "nice to have" but a democratic necessity.

When the presidency shifted to South Africa, organisers noted that information integrity was absent from official G20 documents. In response, they resolved to convene a physical M20 Summit in Johannesburg. Its success and strong turnout underscored both the urgency of collective action and the universal challenges facing the media. The progressive M20 Johannesburg Declaration reflected this shared recognition that safeguarding reliable information requires cross-sector collaboration and global solidarity.

M20 Johannesburg Declaration: A global call for information integrity

The M20 Johannesburg Declaration emerged as a central outcome from over 50 global media and civil society organisations, calling for justice and accountability for attacks on journalists, protection against online and physical threats, and renewed attention to sustainability of the media ecosystem. Commitments from government and business leaders underscored the growing recognition that media integrity is a public good. The declaration's inclusion of children's rights was highlighted as innovative, particularly in an era where technology platforms profoundly shape youth experiences and vulnerabilities. The declaration calls on G20 leaders to strengthen media pluralism, uphold information integrity, and foster international collaboration to address challenges such as disinformation and AI-generated content.

Sustainability and innovation

Both speakers emphasised the urgent need for new models to sustain journalism. Ngalwa described SANEF's work on a country fund for journalism and his own launch of a donor-funded Johannesburg-based news agency focused on governance. The shift to non-profit models reflects changing realities in the industry. At the same time, innovation is key: experiments with AI and chatbots were noted as early but potentially transformative developments, alongside efforts to leverage digital platforms responsibly.

Collaboration and independence

Khadija Patel reflected on the diversity of participants and the strength of global and business partnerships in Johannesburg, noting that international colleagues expressed admiration for the strong business sector engagement in South Africa. Both speakers stressed the importance of the M20 remaining independent from formal G20 structures, giving it freedom to shape the agenda without political capture. Going forward, the challenge will be to embed national and local perspectives into the process while sustaining momentum across countries.

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PANEL 4: Battle for Press Freedom – Political Power & Internet Shutdowns

Participants:

▸ **Dr Tabani Moyo** – Regional Director, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe

▸ **Janet Gbam** – Senior Programme Officer, Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression, ARTICLE 19 Senegal & West Africa

▸ **Nora Mbagathi** – Executive Director, Katiba Institute, Kenya

▸ Moderated by **Dr Marystella Simiyu**, Africa Senior Legal Advocacy Officer, International Press Institute, Kenya

With only four African countries ranked as satisfactory on Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, this panel explored growing threats to press freedom in Africa, including legal harassment, state surveillance, and internet shutdowns. It also considered strategies media organisations and civil society are deploying to regain control of journalism and protect freedom of expression.

Key takeaways:

▸ State innovation in digital surveillance and censorship is outpacing legal protections, thereby leading to internet shutdowns and live broadcast bans being used as tools of repression.

▸ Fragmented efforts and geopolitical funding challenges call for renewed solidarity and strategic collaboration among journalists, activists, and legal institutions.

▸ The fight for press freedom now includes resisting monopolistic practices by platforms and ensuring equitable access to verifiable information.

▸ Legal frameworks alone cannot fix what technology has broken. Design, training, and constitutional tools must be leveraged to protect rights.

From Left to Right: Nora Mbagathi, Janet Gbam, Dr Tabani Moyo, Dr Marystella Simiyu

This panel discussion offered a multifaceted exploration of the escalating threats to journalism and press freedom across Africa, using the June 2025 anniversary protests in Kenya as a powerful entry point. **Dr Marystella Simiyu** opened this discussion by reflecting on the public outrage experienced over bad governance and declining human rights in Kenya, which then instigated these protests. Specifically, Simiyu highlighted how journalists were caught in the crossfire as they were attacked by both protestors and police. In concluding this reflection, Simiyu emphasised how this incident was emblematic of the growing weaponisation of legal frameworks to silence dissent, with tactics ranging from laws criminalising "false news" and defamation to the rise in Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and foreign agent laws and legislation.

Weaponisation of court processes

The participants highlighted how governments are innovating new methods of surveillance and censorship, often outpacing the legal protections meant to safeguard journalists. **Nora Mbagath**i from the Katiba Institute pointed to the enduring influence of colonial-era laws such as licensing restrictions and cybercrime statutes that continue to be used to suppress media freedom in East Africa. Mbagathi noted that while there have been positive developments, such as Kenya's 2017 repeal of criminal defamation laws and the rise of access to information tools, the legal environment remains fraught. The role of traditional tech companies, particularly telecommunications firms like Safaricom, was emphasised as often overlooked yet deeply implicated in data collection and censorship. The discussion also delved into the criminalisation of journalism through SLAPPs, especially in the climate and tech sectors. Mbagathi called for stronger jurisprudence and legislative reform to prevent such abuses and stressed the importance of cross-sector collaboration.

Dr Tabani Moyo, representing MISA, described the shifting media landscape in Southern Africa, where governments and organised societal groups increasingly view journalists as threats. Moyo recounted the 2023 killing of a journalist in Lesotho, where online threats translated into offline violence, and emphasised the mental health toll on journalists. Moyo further highlighted that the broken media ecosystem, compounded by geopolitical funding challenges, demonstrates the need for localised collaboration and a renewed form of solidarity to counter fragmented efforts and that limited resources now require using social capital and focusing on literacy around negotiation tactics to minimise harm.

Janet Gbam from ARTICLE 19 discussed the prevalence of internet shutdowns in West Africa, noting that only a handful of countries have avoided them. Gbam cited the ECOWAS Court's rulings in Togo and Senegal and endorsed these rulings for setting critical jurisprudence. Another encouraging case study, as noted by Gbam, is ARTICLE 19's "Digital Market Watch" initiative, which seeks to counter unfair competition and support small media outlets to ensure that platforms do not abuse market dominance and that communities retain access to verifiable information.

The disconnect between activists and legal systems

A recurring theme was the disconnect between activists and legal systems. Mbagathi argued that laws are often either designed to restrict press freedom or are abused for that purpose and noted how data protection laws, for example, can be used as a tool for repression. She stressed the need to view technology through a human rights lens, as legal remedies alone cannot fix what flawed design has broken. Moyo addressed the challenge of engaging

with state surveillance when there is little political will. He observed that the more journalists perform checks and balances, the more they are seen as a menace to power. To give context, Moyo noted how governments are now reintroducing sedition and defamation laws under the guise of cybersecurity.

The panel closed with reflections on mis/disinformation and the legal justification for internet shutdowns. Mbagathi emphasised that shutdowns should be assessed using a proportionality and necessity test, and that legal and political analysis is essential.

Questions from the audience raised critical issues, specifically on how to build legal resilience. The audience drew attention to the following:

▸ The importance of adopting mechanisms to ensure that every shutdown is not treated as an emergency.

▸ The role of mobile operators in resisting shutdown orders; the tension between press freedom and political power.

▸ The challenge of separating press freedom from the influence of tech platforms.

▸ The relevance of international instruments, such as resolutions from the African Union on internet shutdowns.

> "Do we need stronger language to defend press freedom, or must we first confront the limitations already embedded in our systems?"
> – *Janet Gbam, Senior Programme Officer Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression*

From Left to Right: Sha'ista Goga, Ninette Mwarania, James Hodge, Mercy Mutemi, Adv Pansy Tlakula

PANEL 5: Regulatory Responses in the African Digital Economy

Participants:

▸ **James Hodge** – Chief Economist & Acting Deputy Commissioner, The Competition Commission of South Africa

▸ **Ninette Mwarania** – Manager, Planning, Policy and Research,
The Competition Authority of Kenya

▸ **Adv Pansy Tlakula** – Chairperson, Information Regulator
South Africa

▸ **Mercy Mutemi** – Lawyer and Human Rights-in-Tech Architect, The Oversight Lab Africa

▸ Moderated by **Sha'ista Goga** – Director, Acacia Economics, South Africa

Key takeaways:

▸ African regulators and courts are actively addressing big tech dominance and anti-competitive practices, using a combination of competition law, information access statutes, and human rights frameworks.

▸ Media sustainability and the protection of local media economies are central concerns, with regulators exploring ways to improve revenue, referral traffic, and algorithmic transparency.

▸ Jurisdictional challenges are significant, as global platforms often operate beyond national reach, highlighting the need for creative regulatory strategies and legal actions.

▸ Coordinated, cross-border collaboration is critical to ensure that interventions are effective, scalable, and enforceable.

▸ Human rights considerations, including freedom of expression, labour rights, and equitable access to information, are being integrated into regulatory approaches to safeguard democratic participation and media integrity.

The panel on Regulatory Responses in the African Digital Economy examined the evolving landscape of digital markets across the continent, focusing on how African regulators and courts are responding to the dominance of global tech platforms. Participants explored the challenges posed by anti-competitive practices, algorithmic opacity, and revenue losses for local media, while highlighting innovative legal and regulatory strategies being deployed to protect media sustainability and promote fair digital markets. The discussion emphasised the critical role of human rights frameworks, the importance of cross-border collaboration, and the need for coordinated, scalable interventions to ensure that digital ecosystems in Africa remain transparent, accountable, and supportive of local journalism and democratic participation.

Regulatory and legal responses to big tech

Ninette Mwarania and **James Hodge** outlined how market inquiries and competition law are being deployed in both Kenya and South Africa to assess and curb anti-competitive behaviour in search engines, social media, AI, and ad tech.

Hodge highlighted key insights from the MDPMI in South Africa, noting that the inquiry has allowed regulators to examine the ecosystem comprehensively and identify features that may impede competition. He highlighted that search engines and social media often limit referral traffic to local media, favour foreign content, and prioritise engagement over news accuracy, while AI and ad tech increasingly rely on copyrighted materials, creating both challenges and emerging content licensing markets. Despite these developments, local media remain undercompensated, and he stressed that global coordination is essential, as national efforts alone cannot counter the dominance of global tech platforms.

Jurisdiction and enforcement

Adv Pansy Tlakula highlighted the dual mandate of South Africa's Information Regulator, enforcing data protection and access-to-information laws against global platforms. Tlakula highlighted the jurisdictional challenges faced by the Information Regulator in requesting information on their advertising competition practices or elections, for example, from various social media platforms. Importantly, she highlighted that jurisdictional challenges require innovative legal strategies, including court engagement, to ensure accountability and transparency.

Mercy Mutemi further highlighted the jurisdictional challenges of holding global tech companies accountable, noting an active case in Kenya against Meta for algorithmic amplification of harmful content. She emphasised the need for creative human rights litigation, which prioritises people over products, and celebrated a landmark decision allowing courts to scrutinise Facebook's algorithms under human rights law. She identified five key human rights impacts at the intersection of journalism and AI: monetisation-driven content optimisation affecting freedom of expression, embedded discrimination in tech practices, copyright and "zero-click" issues, labour market disruptions from AI, and the risks of a fragmented internet with uneven global access, underscoring the urgent need for innovative regulation across the continent.

Participants stressed the importance of coordinated action among regulators, courts, media houses, and civil society. Public hearings, evidence sharing, and cross-border cooperation are essential to create fair digital markets, sustain local media, and ensure that regulatory interventions have a meaningful impact.

> "From a human rights perspective, there are deeper implications. What are we doing to the right to freedom of expression? What are we doing to the right to freedom of the media?"
> – Mercy Mutemi, The Oversight Lab Africa

DAY 2: AI, Emerging Technology, and the Future of Journalism in Africa

Keynote Address: African Languages, AI, and the Impact on African Journalism

> "Equitable AI means African citizens can consume and contribute to media in their mother tongues."
> – *Prof Vukosi Marivate, University of Pretoria*

▸ **Prof Vukosi Marivate** – Chair of Data Science, Professor of Computer Science, University of Pretoria and co-founder, Lelapa AI, South Africa

▸ Day two of the conference kick-started with a keynote address from Prof Vukosi Marivate from the University of Pretoria.

Marivate began his keynote by providing a foundational explanation of machine learning as a subset of AI that identifies patterns from data. Marivate highlighted that, unlike traditional programming, where developers had to write explicit instructions for machines to interpret input, machine learning allows systems to learn from vast amounts of data and derive complex decision boundaries and that this paradigm shift has revolutionised fields like natural language processing (NLP), which has a rich 70-year history encompassing machine translation, speech recognition, and text-to-speech technologies.

Marivate, however, noted that despite these advancements, the recent surge in large language models (LLMs) has largely centred on English, thereby limiting linguistic inclusivity. Marivate further highlighted the limitations of models like GPT-3.5, which in early 2023 failed to correctly process African languages such as isiZulu.

> "African languages representation matters. We have 2 000 languages on the African continent, but most are actually invisible to AI LLMs"
> – *Prof Vukosi Marivate, University of Pretoria*

On the broader issue of the underperformance of LLMs on African language tasks, Marivate referenced the findings from AfriBench which revealed that when searches were made in African languages, open-source models averaged below 50% accuracy, while some closed models reached around 60% but that when the models were fine-tuned specifically for African languages and tasks, performance improved significantly, surpassing 70%.

Marivate highlighted that these disparities are rooted in data scarcity. He highlighted that non-English data is often excluded from training data and from databases due to the lack of safety filters capable of detecting harmful content in low-resource languages. Marivate noted that while this exclusion is rooted in safety concerns, the consequence is that foundational data used to train LLMs is skewed, thereby resulting in models that reflect a narrow, English-dominant worldview. Further, Marivate highlighted that this exclusion affects access to timely, accurate, and relatable information thereby undermining the dignity and agency of African communities.

In closing, Marivate highlighted some of the emerging community-led initiatives that are working to bridge the gap. These include:

▸ Masakhane, a grassroots natural language processing (NLP) movement which collaborates with local journalists, linguists, and technologists to create new datasets and evaluation tools.

▸ Projects like Marito that provide terminology lists for South African languages thereby enabling more accurate and contextual translations.

▸ Participatory benchmarks and open science efforts aimed at empowering communities to shape AI tools that reflect their linguistic and cultural realities.

While noting these initiatives, Marivate emphasised that innovation in AI need not be limited to LLMs and noted that "there might be a good translation tool, a speech tool – all of these are worth studying and making better." He highlighted the importance of multilingual speech systems and compact models alongside licensing frameworks to ensure sustainable data practices that benefit local communities. In closing, Marivate encouraged participants to "go out there and interact with all these communities and try to then find ways that you can use [LLMs] in your work."

PANEL 6: African Strategies on AI, Governance, and Digital Inclusion

Participants:

▸ Provocation by: **Prof Alison Gillwald** – Founding Director and Emeritus Distinguished Fellow, Research ICT Africa, South Africa

This panel, led by a provocation from Professor Alison Gillwald from Research ICT Africa. Gillwald offered a critical interrogation of Africa's positioning within global AI governance noting the emergent need to depart from siloed, purpose-driven approaches to AI policy. Instead, Gillwald advocated for a holistic and politically grounded framework that recognises AI's embeddedness across economic, social, and geopolitical domains. Gillwald emphasised that while national policies dominate discourse, the conditions shaping AI deployment are globally determined and that, in turn, Africans must be present in these global governance spaces, especially given that current outcomes are failing to serve African interests. According to Gillwald, the dominant paradigms are more conservative than Africa's own frameworks and reflect entrenched power asymmetries that have evolved over decades of technological development.

In closing, Gillwald stressed that AI does not merely have an ethics problem – it has an epistemological one. According to Gillwald, dominant narratives encode external strategies, values, and futures, often sidelining African voices. The panel was then invited by the following reflection:

> "The public broadcaster could become the major source of data input for large language modelling… You could create a real virtuous cycle of local and public interest AI."

Panel discussion:

At the intersection of governance and media, artificial intelligence and digital policies are rapidly reshaping Africa's information landscapes. Recent frameworks such as the African Union's Continental AI Strategy and the ACHPR Resolution(s) are setting agendas for how AI will impact press freedom, digital rights, and inclusion. This panel explored the efficiency of these instruments and their implication for media and digital inclusion.

> "If you don't get data governance right then, of course, you will not get AI policies right."
> – *Liz Orembo, Research ICT Africa*

▸ **Liz Orembo** – Researcher (International Stakeholder Relations), Research ICT Africa, Kenya

▸ **Prof Thompson Chengeta** – Professor of International Law and Artificial Intelligence Technologies, Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom

▸ **Churchill Otieno** – Executive Director, Eastern Africa Editors Society, Kenya

▸ Moderated by **Zoé Titus** – Executive Director, NMT Media Foundation, Namibia

Key takeaways:

▸ AI governance in Africa must be holistic and should not only address technical regulation but also broader political, economic, and epistemological dimensions.

▸ Ethics-by-design models are insufficient as they overlook systemic exclusions and invisibilities, especially for populations without meaningful access to AI tools.

▸ Without democratic control over data, AI systems will continue to reinforce inequality and undermine rights.

▸ Public value must move beyond siloed frameworks to inclusive, locally rooted strategies that centre African voices and lived experiences.

▸ Africa must lead its own AI agenda. This starts from resource extraction to deployment whilst resisting extractivist models.

The participants expanded on these themes outlined in the provocation with **Zoé Titus** from the NMT Foundation, asserting that parity of participation must be accompanied by representation and redistribution. Titus highlighted that AI is not merely reshaping technology but governance itself and thus raises urgent questions about whose narratives and values are being embedded in these systems. Further, Titus opened the panel by highlighting the epistemological crisis at the heart of AI, which she noted goes beyond ethics and then questioned whether current governance frameworks are truly advancing Africa's interests or protecting press freedom.

Liz Orembo from Research ICT Africa kicked off the panel by pointing out that while Africa is strong on paper, implementation remains weak. Orembo explained that existing AI and data policies rarely mention media protections and are undermined by executive interference and gaps in data protection enforcement. Orembo then cited examples of state surveillance and intimidation, particularly around political satire, and lamented the discouragement of investigative journalism. Such an example cited the inability to discuss the DRC, the mineral backbone of AI, and how this illustrates the silencing of critical discourse.

Prof Thompson Chengeta, drawing from his work at the African Commission, emphasised that governance must be rooted in human rights and that while Africa's legal frameworks, particularly the African Charter, offer a strong foundation, implementation is hampered by the interests of big tech and the complicity or inertia of local powers. Chengeta stressed that adequacy must be measured by real-world impact, not theoretical compliance, and that governance must serve all people and not just elites. Chengeta also critiqued the reactive nature of African policymaking, which often adopts external agendas that fail to address local developmental and financial pressures.

In discussing the newsrooms' perspective, **Churchill Otieno** noted that AI governance is largely absent from media discourse. Otieno noted that in many African territories, ICT leads tech policy while media remains silent and that AI deployment is uneven, with larger institutions exploring its use while smaller entities are excluded, especially where vernacular audio and video dominate. Otieno warned of exploitative practices by big

tech, where creators are unaware of how their content is used and called for journalism to align with public interest and to help citizens understand the shifting narratives and data landscapes shaped by AI. Otieno then called for a renewed commitment to public interest journalism and urged journalists to educate the public about shifting narratives and data landscapes. He then stressed that journalism must remain central to democratic institutions and that power must be actively reclaimed and not passively received.

The discussion closed with reflections on real agency for Africa:

‣ Chengeta argued against superficial fixes like bias mitigation, calling instead for the structural eradication of injustices.

‣ Orembo questioned the notion of data ownership, noting that many Africans consent to data use without understanding its implications. She further highlighted that datafication continues to be driven by development organisations, yet access to public service delivery data remains elusive. Orembo then urged deeper epistemic enquiry into how market forces marginalise vulnerable populations, such as job seekers.

‣ Churchill concluded by making a call for civil society to make data more accessible to journalists and for a shift from adaptation to authorship.

From Left to Right: Zoé Titus, Liz Orembo, Prof Thompson Chengeta, Churchill Otieno

ADDRESS: Global South Collaboration on AI, Media Sustainability, and Algorithmic Transparency

▸ **Nina Santos** – Deputy Secretary, Digital Policies at the Communication Secretariat, Presidency of the Republic of Brazil

The last address from the conference was presented by Deputy Secretary Nina Santos from the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil. Santos began by highlighting the threat that the concentration of power and control has on bureaucratic efforts seen across the globe. Santos emphasised that in order to truly empower people, it is essential to ensure access to reliable, accurate, and pluralistic sources of information and that this access enables individuals to make informed decisions, participate meaningfully in democratic processes, and even question or criticise their governments in an effort to sustain democracy.

In this context, Santos highlighted ongoing efforts to shape the future of artificial intelligence policy in Brazil:

▸ The first is the push to pass an AI Bill currently under review in the Chamber of Deputies. Santos explained that this legislation aims to adopt a risk-based approach to AI governance and balance innovation with safeguards. Notably, it includes provisions to ensure remuneration for copyright holders.

▸ Secondly, Santos gave reference to Brazil's National AI Plan which sets a strategic vision through 2028. Santos explained that this plan is tailored to the country's unique needs and emphasises the creation of a Centre for Algorithmic Transparency and Accountable AI.

Beyond policy, Santos stressed the importance of finding concrete and sustainable solutions, particularly those that are independent and locally driven. One such approach, as proposed by Santos, involves incubating information-based businesses that contribute to the long-term viability of the tech ecosystem.

Importantly, Santos highlighted that these efforts cannot succeed in isolation and that building a more democratic and inclusive digital future requires international cooperation, regional alliances, and strategic action.

> "To move forward on this agenda, we need an international approach. We need regional alliances and strategic actions between governments, universities and civil society. […] I am confident that this is a very powerful space to advance, to reunite, to coordinate the next steps on building a more democratic digital world for all of us."
> – Nina Santos, Digital Policies at the Communication Secretariat, Presidency of the Republic of Brazil

PANEL 7: Preparing for the Future: Data and Journalism

▸ Provocation by **Dr Shikoh Gitau** – CEO, Qhala, Kenya

This panel discussion was sparked by a provocation from Dr Shikoh Gitau who offered a multifaceted exploration of Africa's digital future through the lens of AI, data governance, and narrative control. Gitau opened with a reflection on the urgency and ambiguity surrounding AI adoption in Africa and highlighted that while many feel the need to engage with AI, few understand why or how it should serve African interests. This disconnect, Gitau argued, is symptomatic of deeper structural issues: particularly the erasure of African narratives and the misrepresentation of African realities within global AI systems.

Gitau illustrated this with a striking example: a prompt engineering experiment revealed that AI systems refused to generate an image of an African doctor caring for white children unless the prompt was altered to reference "traditional medicine." This bias, Gitau noted, is not just technical but rather epistemological. According to Gitau, this reflects how African identities are encoded, excluded, or distorted in the foundational layers of AI.

To close off the provocation, Gitau provided a foundational breakdown of AI's architecture, highlighting that it comprises multiple layers from hardware and cloud infrastructure, to user interfaces, people, and processes.

> "Narrative sovereignty equals economic and political sovereignty"
> – *Dr Shikoh Gitau, Qhala*

As a parting consideration, Gitau reminded the audience that Africa continuously faced exclusion in the rollout of AI models and this was seen from access to computing power and data storage, to underrepresentation in training datasets and language models and that even where African languages are included, they are often tokenised or poorly represented.

Panel discussion:

This panel explored data access and use for editorial and business purposes, and how these link up to Africa's affordances in the global AI stack and to African data governance regimes.

Participants:

▸ **Lwazi Maseko** – Programme Officer, Journalism AI, South Africa

▸ **Odanga Madung** – Co-founder and Managing Director, Odipo Dev, Kenya

▸ **Zenzele Ndebele** – Director, Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE), Zimbabwe

▸ **Nwabisa Makunga** – Managing Director, News and Media at Arena Holdings, South Africa

▸ Moderated by **Prof Guy Berger**, Distinguished Fellow, Research ICT Africa, South Africa

Key takeaways:

▸ Narrative sovereignty is political sovereignty and Africa's digital future depends on reclaiming its stories, languages, and data from biased AI systems and global monopolies.

▸ AI's greatest threat is erasure, and this erasure is seen when considering who is online, which languages are represented, and who trains and moderates models.

▸ Regulation must be opportunity-driven and not reactive. Africa needs rights-based, market-based, and state-based frameworks that reflect its own priorities and realities.

▸ Access to data is a right, not a privilege.

▸ AI cannot replace human judgment. While it fills gaps in newsrooms, it must be used cautiously, with awareness of its limitations and risks.

> "Africa loses around US$4.2 billion a year due to biased narratives."
> – *Dr Shikoh Gitau, Qhala*

From Left to Right: Prof Guy Berger, Odanga Madung, Zenzele Ndebele, Lwazi Maseko, Nwabisa Makunga

The panel itself explored how AI regulation in Africa can be proactive and opportunity-driven as opposed to merely being reactive to global trends. **Prof Guy Berger** from Research ICT Africa initiated the discussion by exploring the meaning of "data" in general:

▸ **Lwazi Maseko** from Journalism AI described data as currency and an enabler of sustainable business.

▸ **Nwabisa Makunga** from Arena Holdings described data as "currency" and an enabler to us running and managing sustainable businesses.

▸ **Zenzele Ndebele** from CITE called it the fuel of storytelling; and

▸ **Odanga Madung** offered a more philosophical take by describing data as what "we use to prove we are right."

Berger then mapped out the layers of data infrastructure from rare earths and cloud Graphic Processing Units (GPUs) to machine learning frameworks, apps, and end-users to position the role of data not just as a resource, but also a force that powers every layer of the AI stack. The participants then stressed that Africa must "fit in before it can compete" by building capacity across sourcing, production, distribution, and consumption.

Madung highlighted the shifting dynamics of data access. To give context, Madung explained that initially, tech platforms provided data for advertising, which activists repurposed for civic research and that this has since led to backlash, lawsuits, and increased restrictions. Madung further added that today, scraping data from websites can be considered a violation, and researchers face legal threats for using data in the public interest.

Ndebele and Maseko discussed how journalists can use limited datasets creatively. Maseko shared examples of bots flagging anomalies in property records, leading to investigative stories but noted that scattered and unstructured data, such as procurement records from Stats SA and National Treasury, pose challenges, thereby making it imperative to upskill journalists to interpret and leverage existing data.

> "No African data, no African AI"
> – *Prof Guy Berger, Research ICT Africa*

Madung emphasised the need for media teams to understand user data and audience segmentation. He explained that advertisers now demand nuanced insights, pushing media houses to adopt AI tools. Madung however cautioned that AI is not a panacea; it has not necessarily delivered the transformative profits many expected, and its use in content moderation raises ethical concerns. To address this, Madung proposed "tailor-made sandboxes" for data storage to safeguard sovereignty.

The panel closed with a call to move from adaptation to authorship. The participants emphasised that Africa must define its own AI agenda and that it must be one rooted in visibility, dignity, and truth. Maseko reminded the audience that AI cannot replace human judgment, it can only augment it. Madung urged cautious optimism and warned against overreliance on AI to save media companies. Instead, Madung proposed that focus be directed towards building resilient, ethical, and locally grounded systems.

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> "In AI, we build, we borrow,
>     we rent, or we steal"
>  – Odanga Madung, Odipo Dev
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PANEL 8: Platforms, Journalism and Society: Perspectives on the Future

▸ Provocation by: **Richard Gingras** – Centre for News, Technology and Innovation, and Village Media, USA

Richard Gingras opened the session with a personal provocation that set the tone for the panel. Drawing on five decades in media (including 15 years at Google and work on the Google News Initiative) he reflected on the profound, phased shifts the internet has produced in how societies gather information and engage with one another.

Gingras warned that well-intentioned public policy (on disinformation, copyright and funding) can have unintended consequences, particularly in contexts where authoritarian actors are gaining ground. He argued that neither policy nor money is a silver bullet and that any funding must be invested in sustainable, research-driven strategies.

Gingras emphasised that easier access to more media has tended to fragment societies rather than unify them, a dynamic that predates the internet, and that news organisations must adapt to operate effectively within this polarised environment. He set out four practical priorities for newsrooms and funders: study the market, rethink models of trustworthiness, reimagine how evolved media can strengthen communities, and redesign civic-engagement models to address contemporary civic challenges.

Gingras highlighted the potential of local news to serve broad community information needs, celebrating local successes while acting as watchdog, and noted that locally focused models can be commercially viable. He argued that building trust across social divides is harder but more valuable than reinforcing existing affinities. He also cautioned against blurring fact-based reporting with opinion and stressed that errors of context can be more damaging than factual errors when shaping public perception and fear.

Gingras closed with concrete recommendations and a call to leadership and experimentation:

▸ Understand the information needs of the market and not just individual readers.

▸ Measure how communities assess your performance.

▸ Be rigorous in re-earning trust and explore new forms that address changing media behaviour.

▸ Experiment with ways to lead communities toward consensus on important issues.

He concluded on an optimistic note: technological disruption, including AI, will continue, but constructive paths forward exist if news leaders combine research, community-centred practice and sustained, strategic investment.

Panel discussion:

Participants:

- ▸ **Thabo Makenete** – Head of Public Policy, Southern Africa Region, Meta, South Africa

- ▸ **Abongile Mashele** – Google Government Affairs and Public Policy team for South Africa

- ▸ **Khaled Mansour** – Member, META Oversight Board, Egypt

- ▸ Moderated by **Vincent Maher** – CEO, BroadBrand, South Africa

This session was held under Chatham House rules, enabling an open and candid exchange of perspectives without attributing remarks to specific individuals or organisations.

The panel explored how global digital platforms are shaping African journalism and society. Featuring both platform representatives and independent voices, the discussion examined accountability, content governance, and the future of public interest media in a platform-dominated ecosystem. Participants reflected on the impact of digital platforms on journalism, public policy, and information integrity, highlighting the disruption technology has caused, not only in publishing but across sectors, and raising questions about how platforms, media, and governments can collaborate more effectively.

Concerns were raised about the concentration of power among major platforms, the decline of traditional news outlets, and the economic pressures facing journalism. Debate centred on the fairness of economic relationships between platforms and publishers, with differing views on the value of news content to platforms and the challenge of defining what constitutes "news." The conversation also addressed the role of regulation and the risks of disinformation, particularly during elections and conflicts, emphasising the need for effective policies and greater responsibility from technology companies.

Participants further questioned whether current funding initiatives for independent media are sustainable, and stressed the importance of supporting local languages, newsroom transformation, and innovation in business models.

Looking ahead, they acknowledged that technological disruption will continue, especially with the rise of AI, and highlighted the need to adapt business and editorial models, develop uniquely African solutions, and prioritise the protection of information integrity as essential for both democracy and business stability.

From Left to Right: Abongile Mashele, Khaled Mansour, Thabo Makenete

Takeaways from CTRL+J Africa +++++++++++++++++

The CTRL+J Africa conference marked a pivotal moment in asserting Africa's leadership in global media and digital governance. Below are the key takeaways, which highlight the continent's shift from reactive participation to proactive agenda-setting, entering narrative sovereignty, inclusive innovation, and South–South collaboration to build equitable and resilient information ecosystems.

1. Africa's growing leadership in setting the global media reform agenda

The conference affirmed Africa's growing leadership in defining frameworks for media sustainability, competition policy, and digital governance, moving from adaptation to authorship in global debates about technology and democracy. Across regulatory, funding, and innovation fronts, African institutions are shifting from reactive participation to proactive agenda-setting in the global information landscape.

2. Digital sovereignty begins with control over narratives and data

Reclaiming storytelling power and ensuring ownership of African data are essential to building digital systems that reflect the continent's values, cultures, and political agency, and to resisting externally imposed identities. Narrative sovereignty was recognised as essential to cultural dignity, political autonomy, and fair representation in global media and technology systems.

3. The M20 emerged as a strategic initiative shaping global media policy

Through the adoption of the Johannesburg Declaration, the M20 strengthened its role as a strategic, independent actor in global media governance. Positioned as an unofficial G20 engagement group, this Global South-driven initiative advances frameworks on information integrity, media sustainability, and child protection, amongst other key issues, prioritising media freedom, information ecosystem resilience, and inclusive digital governance to shape media policy in the public interest.

4. Platform accountability through rights-based regulation

African regulators and courts are increasingly using competition law, human-rights standards, and access-to-information legislation to enforce jurisdiction and platform accountability. Voluntary measures by global tech companies are inadequate: coordinated, transparent, and legally grounded frameworks are needed to secure fair compensation, algorithmic transparency, and public accountability.

5. Press freedom is increasingly threatened by digital repression

Widespread state surveillance, internet shutdowns, broadcast bans, and restrictive laws are threatening press freedom and journalistic integrity across regions. In response, there is an urgent need for robust legal and constitutional protections, regional solidarity, and ongoing transnational advocacy to defend journalism and the free flow of information.

6. Sustainable journalism depends on diverse funding sources and shared infrastructure

A healthy media ecosystem requires varied revenue streams such as regulation, philanthropy, and innovation, combined with cooperation between large and small publishers to ensure independence and resilience. Support for local media must prioritise editorial independence, local content production, and equitable access to resources across diverse media landscapes.

7. Independent and community media remain pillars of public trust

Despite operating under severe financial strain, smaller, often vernacular-based outlets sustain accountability and representation, reaching communities frequently ignored by mainstream media. Their proximity to audiences and commitment to transparency make them essential actors in amplifying vulnerable and marginalised voices.

8. Mis/disinformation erodes democracy and carries real economic costs

False and polarising content undermines public trust, distorts policy, and damages economic stability, reinforcing the urgent need for credible, fact-based public-interest journalism. Mis/disinformation imposes measurable economic harm, including reduced GDP and increased borrowing costs, while independent media play a critical role in countering these effects through verified, context-rich reporting.

9. Youth and creators are redefining civic engagement and media participation

Youth engagement is driven by authenticity and lived experiences, with young Africans turning to creators and platforms that reflect their socio-political realities. Their participation is reshaping civic discourse and demanding new models of journalism that are participatory, culturally resonant, and resistant to algorithmic bias.

10. AI governance must be holistic, democratic, and globally representative

AI regulation should incorporate political, economic, and epistemological considerations, prioritising African voices in both design and oversight. Governance must specifically address inequalities in data access and representation. Africa should build democratic systems of control for AI that embody its diverse values, languages, and experiences, while actively rejecting extractivist approaches.

11. Artificial intelligence must be inclusive, multilingual, and community-driven

AI systems that exclude African languages and contexts perpetuate inequality; inclusive development and governance of AI are vital for linguistic and cultural survival and for equitable participation in the digital economy. With 2,000 African languages largely invisible to AI systems, communities must help develop training data, language models, and governance frameworks to ensure equitable access and prevent further marginalisation.

12. South–South collaboration is key to strengthening collective influence

As evidenced by the CTRL+J alliance, tricontinental solidarity and partnerships across Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Africa not only strengthen negotiating power with global platforms but also enable the Global South to collectively shape digital policy and media futures. Individual countries cannot effectively counter the dominance of global tech platforms. Synchronised regulatory action, evidence-sharing, and South–South cooperation are essential.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The CTRL+J Africa conference highlighted and reaffirmed Africa's growing leadership in shaping the global discourse on media sustainability, digital rights, and technological governance. Convening voices from across Africa and the global south, the conference demonstrated that African journalists, institutions, and policymakers are no longer passive recipients of global frameworks but are rather architects of new paradigms. From reclaiming narrative sovereignty and defending freedom of expression to pioneering AI governance and regulatory innovation. The continent's commitment to digital sovereignty, cultural dignity, and fair representation drives its transformation of the global information ecosystem.

A key theme was the strategic imperative of 'South-South collaboration' among Africa, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific. This tri-continental solidarity strengthens collective influence in negotiation with global tech platforms, fosters regulatory innovation, and amplifies marginalised voices. The conference emphasised that building resilient ecosystems requires more than convening like-minded actors, it demands cross-sector alliances across journalism, policy, technology and civil society.

The conference also emphasised that independent, community, and youth media are not but pivotal actors in building inclusive, rights-based digital ecosystems that resist algorithmic biases and digital repression. Sustainable journalism requires diversified funding models, cooperation amongst large and small publishers, and robust protections against increasing digital repression and misinformation. Embedding human rights into media and digital policy frameworks, especially freedom of expression, data privacy, and platform accountability, is essential.

Looking ahead, the CTRL+J series will focus on:

▶ Operationalising cross-regional alliances;

▶ Scaling sustainable funding; and

▶ Establishing monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and resilience.

The path forward demands bold, concerted efforts anchored in truth, culture, and creativity. Through collaboration across journalism, policy, technology, governments, regulators, and civil society, Africa and the Global South can build media ecosystems that not only withstand contemporary challenges but also serve democratic aspirations and the public interest.

Speakers Bios ++

Prof Alison Gillwald – Founding Director, Research ICT Africa/T20, South Africa

Alison Gillwald (PhD) is the founding director of Research ICT Africa (RIA), where she is currently the Emeritus Distinguished Fellow. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Cape Town's, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance. During South Africa's Presidency of the G20 this year, she has served as a technical advisor to the G20 Digital Economy Work Group and the High-Level Task Force on Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance, Innovation. She also co-chairs the T20 Task Force on Digital Transformation. Alison led the RIA team commissioned by UNESCO to prepare a position paper on information integrity for the Brazilian G20 and served on the Brazilian T20. Alison has led RIA's technical assistance to the African Union Commission on the AU Data Policy Framework and implementation plan. She has been active in the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), most recently co-leading the Algorithmic Transparency in the Public Sector project.

Amahle-Imvelo 'Jaxx' Jaxa - Entrepreneur, Content Creator and Youth Advocate, South Africa

Amahle-Imvelo Jaxa is an entrepreneur, content creator, and youth advocate who uses her voice both online and offline to educate, provoke thought, and spark change. With over 230,000 TikTok followers and 17 million views, she's built a powerful platform where South Africans learn about current affairs, history, and civic engagement with clarity, wit, and relevance.

She is currently completing her Honours in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, after earning her undergraduate degree in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from the University of South Africa. Her academic grounding informs her digital activism, and her goal is clear: to equip young people to think critically, challenge systems, and shape their futures.

Amahle is the former co-founder of UntilUntil, a pioneering marketing and youth events company that provided employment, mentorship, and creative opportunities for young South Africans. Through her new podcast Jaxx of All Trades, her viral TikTok current affairs explainers, and public speaking, Amahle reminds us that freedom isn't just inherited. It's built together, generation by generation.

Asafika Mpako – Communication Coordinator, Afrobarometer, South Africa

Asafika Mpako is the communications coordinator for Southern Africa at Afrobarometer. She specialises in policy influencing, particularly in sharing research findings through non-academic communications outputs such as evidence briefs, press statements, television, radio, and other media, enabling local and international stakeholders to make informed programmatic decisions and to generate and evaluate policy interventions.

Her professional and academic experiences span four continents – Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Asafika holds a Bachelor's from the University of Cape Town, and Masters degree from Peking University and the London School of Economics, including certificates from the University of Oxford and Bridgewater State University, respectively.

She has been featured in the London Financial Times on the global list of 2023 Women of the Future, 50 Rising Stars in ESG, and is also a recipient of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, the United States' flagship program for investing in the next generation of young African leaders.

Chris Kabwato – Director, Digital Arts Africa, South Africa

Chris Kabwato is the director of Digital Arts Africa, a media research and communications company based in Johannesburg. In 2024, his research report on media sustainability in Africa was published as part of International Media Support's project 'Where is the money?.' Chris currently sits on the ad-hoc committee of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) tasked with setting up the Journalism Fund SA. He also contributes to the annual State of Press Freedom in Southern Africa report published by the MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa). A former Head of Education and Public Affairs at the British Council (Harare), for over 15 years Chris was the director of the Highway Africa Conference at Rhodes University, South Africa. He is a past director of the South African National Editors Forum as well a former Group Head of Communications and Marketing at Altron.

Christine Mungai – News Editor, The Continent, Kenya

Christine Mungai is a writer, journalist, media trainer, and curator based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is currently the News Editor at The Continent, where she commissions and edits weekly stories from a network of contributors across Africa. Christine has over 15 years of experience in journalism, with her work appearing in leading African and international publications. She is a 2018 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and has served in media leadership roles, most recently as Lead Curator at Baraza Media Lab, where she was the founding curator of the Africa Media Festival. She is also the executive producer of the experimental live journalism event, Story Sosa.

Churchill Otieno – Executive Director, Eastern African Editors Society, Kenya

Churchill Otieno is a Kenyan journalist currently serving as the Executive Director of the Eastern Africa Editors Society (EAES) and President of The Africa Editors Forum (TAEF). He has over 25 years of experience in various digital media roles, including reporting, editing, and media management. He is passionate about the intersection of journalism, and his work often focuses on digital media trends and their impact on the global South. Churchill has previously spoken at several international conferences on media innovation and press freedom.

Daryl Dingley – Partner, Webber Wentzel, South Africa

Daryl specialises in all aspects of competition law, including merger control, cartel and other prohibited practice investigations, exemption applications, and competition law compliance, and has particular expertise in economics and international trade. Daryl's knowledge of competition laws extends to many African countries and regional regulators like the COMESA Competition Commission.

He was also formerly a Senior Economist (Head of Case Analysis) at the South African Competition Commission. His expertise has been recognised by leading international research organisations, including Chambers Global, Legal 500, and Best Lawyers. He is also the co-author of a book on competition law, 'A Practical Guide to the South African Competition Act' and has featured in the South Africa section of the International Comparative Legal Guide to Merger Control. He has B.Soc. Sci and LLB degrees from the University of Cape Town, as well as a Masters in Law and Economics from the University of Hamburg.

Guy Berger – Distinguished Fellow, Research ICT Africa, South Africa

Guy Berger is an independent media and Internet expert. He spent a decade as a senior official at UNESCO, overseeing the Organization's global work on press freedom, safety of journalists, internet freedom and media development. From 1994 to 2010, Berger headed up the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa. He has published and presented extensively, and worked in both television and press, including writing a long-running column on the media for South Africa's Mail & Guardian. Over his career, Berger has been recognised with several awards, and has also served as elected deputy chair of the South African National Editors Forum. He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy from Rhodes University.

Irene Jay Liu – Director, International Fund for Public Interest Media, United Kingdom

Irene Jay Liu is Director of AI, Emerging Technology & Regulation at the International Fund for Public Interest Media. She previously led the Google News Lab in the Asia-Pacific region and was an investigative reporter and data editor at Reuters, where she was a 2017 Pulitzer finalist in the national reporting category. Earlier, she was a reporter at the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong and the Times Union in Albany, New York, and taught data-driven investigative journalism at the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

James Hodge – Chief Economist & Acting Deputy Commissioner, Competition Commission of South Africa, South Africa

James Hodge is the Chief Economist and an Acting Deputy Commissioner at the South African Competition Commission. He is currently chairing the Media and Digital Platforms Market Inquiry, which examines the distribution, AdTech, and AI relationship between media and search/social media platforms.

As Chief Economist, James leads the Economic Research Bureau (ERB), which conducts cutting-edge economic research, develops guidelines and investigative toolkits, and provides expert economic and financial analysis in complex competition investigations and litigation before the Competition Tribunal. His work extends to institutional prioritisation, market insights, market inquiry scoping, proactive complaint initiation, and collaborative research across Africa and globally. James previously chaired the Online Intermediation Platforms Market Inquiry, which imposed significant pro-competitive remedies across search, e-commerce marketplaces, delivery platforms, online classifieds, travel agencies, and app stores. Prior to that, he led market inquiries into data services and grocery retail, securing landmark settlements that reduced data costs, zero-rated public benefit content, and ended exclusive lease agreements by major retail chains.

James Smart – Managing Editor, Broadcast and New Media, Nation Media Group, Kenya

Mr. James Smart is a newsroom leader, creative storyteller, and journalist with a varied portfolio in broadcast media and editorial strategy. He is a former Reagan-Fascell fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

His collection of audio works includes Kenya's most listened-to crime narrative series—Case Number Zero, a story of a blogger who disappeared without a trace; Paradise Lost, the story of one of Kenya's top news media personalities; and Country of Gamblers, a series about gambling in Kenya. He has consulted with Radio Tamazuj, an exiled media organisation from South Sudan, where he collaborated with the management to develop viable news products, guiding the media towards a sustainable business model.

He also worked extensively with SHOFCO, a prominent CBO in Nairobi, after the pandemic, training their journalists in storytelling techniques during uncertain times. He is currently the Managing Editor of Broadcast and New Media at NMG.

Janet Gbam – Senior Programme Officer Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression

Janet Gbam is a human rights lawyer and policy expert specialising in digital rights, freedom of expression, and gender justice. She currently serves as the Regional Lead for Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression at ARTICLE 19, where she leads strategic initiatives to protect online civic space, challenge digital authoritarianism, and advance rights-based governance across the region. With a background spanning legal research, human rights litigation, and governance, risk, and compliance, Janet has worked at the intersection of law, policy, and advocacy to defend human rights in complex and evolving conflict and post-conflict landscapes. Her work is particularly focused on empowering marginalised communities, especially women, and ensuring that national and regional frameworks uphold international human rights standards. Janet holds degrees from universities in Nigeria, South Africa, and the United States, and is currently furthering her expertise through advanced studies at the University of Oxford. She brings a uniquely global perspective grounded in regional experience and a deep commitment to justice and equity.

Khadija Patel – Director, Journalist in Residence, International Fund for Public Interest Media, South Africa

Khadija pushes words on street corners. She is a member of the founding team of the International Fund for Public Interest Media, currently serving as Director: Journalist in Residence. She is an experienced media practitioner, and in former roles, the editor-in-chief of the Mail & Guardian, the co-founder of The Daily Vox, and chairperson of the International Press Institute(IPI). As a journalist, she has produced work for Sky News, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, and Daily Maverick, among others. She is committed to the enhancement and protection of news media as a public good.

Dr Kate Skinner – Executive Director, Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), South Africa

Kate Skinner is the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), the biggest community media print and online membership organisation in South Africa. A media freedom activist since 1994, she has launched initiatives such as the SOS: Save Public Broadcasting Coalition and served as Executive Director of the South African National Editors' Forum.

Lisa Muchangi – Marketing and Communications Manager, Baraza Media Lab, Kenya

Lisa Muchangi is a communications and branding professional with a track record of shaping strategy and visibility for programs, events, and initiatives within Africa's media sector. At Baraza Media Lab, she leads marketing and communications across a diverse portfolio that includes the Africa Media Festival, the Fumbua program on information integrity, experimental events, and fellowship programs.

Her work combines media relations, digital strategy, and brand development to create strong engagement with audiences across journalism, policy, and the creative economy. Lisa is known for building narratives that highlight innovation, credibility, and collaboration, while ensuring initiatives achieve both local and continental reach. She is especially interested in how communications can support independent media, counter disinformation, and build inclusive opportunities for the next generation of practitioners.

Liz Orembo – Research Fellow, Research ICT Africa, Kenya

Liz Orembo leads international partnerships and engagement at Research ICT Africa, fostering multilateral and multistakeholder collaborations on digital policy. Her research expertise includes AI governance, data governance for public good, and information integrity. Previously, she trained journalists and activists in digital security and supported African countries in enhancing cybersecurity posture. She also serves on the Freedom Online Coalition Advisory Network and the KICTANet board of trustees.

Lwazi Maseko – Programme Officer, JournalismAI, South Africa

Lwazi Maseko is a Programme Officer at JournalismAI, a global initiative of Polis, the journalism think-tank at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She leads the planning and curation of the annual JournalismAI Festival, a global gathering that brings together journalists, technologists, and media leaders to discuss the impact of artificial intelligence on journalism and the future of news. She also supports the delivery of the JournalismAI Academy, an international training programme that helps newsrooms strengthen their understanding and use of AI tools in their work.

With experience spanning international media and innovation ecosystems, Lwazi began her career at Bloomberg and later joined Jamlab, where she focused on journalism innovation in Africa. She holds a BA Honours in Journalism and Media Studies from Wits University, a Postgraduate Diploma in Digital Business, and is currently pursuing a Master's in Digital Business at the Wits Business School.

Makmid Kamara – Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East, International Fund for Public Interest Media, Ghana

Makmid Kamara is the Regional Director for Africa and the Middle East at the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM). He is a Sierra Leonean human rights leader, democracy advocate, and development communications practitioner with almost 20 years of experience working with national and international development, human rights, and grant-making organisations in Africa and the United Kingdom. Prior to joining IFPIM, he founded Reform Initiatives, an organization focusing on democracy, transitional justice & human rights, and reparatory justice. Before that, he was the founding Director of the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF), based in Accra, Ghana.

Makmid started his career as a journalist in Sierra Leone and also worked with the country's Vice President at the time. He has written several articles and reports on human rights and social justice, and development issues for high-profile African and European publications and institutions. He has worked with international organizations including Amnesty International, Concern Worldwide, and Oxfam GB. He is a Rotarian, a Senior Global Atlantic Fellow, and an Obama Foundation Leader. He is based in Accra, Ghana.

Dr Marystella Simiyu – Senior Legal Advocacy Officer, International Press Institute, Kenya

Dr Marystella Simiyu is a lawyer and an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. She is currently the Africa Senior Legal Advocacy Officer at the International Press Institute, working to advance press freedom in Africa through research, policy, and advocacy actions. Marystella has previously worked with the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, InformAction-Kenya, and the International Centre for Transitional Justice-Kenya. Her research and advocacy interests include international human rights law, the African human rights system, media, privacy and data protection, elections, disinformation, tech policy, and digital rights.

Mercy Mutemi – Lawyer and Human Rights-in-Tech Architect, The Oversight Lab Africa, Kenya

Mercy Mutemi is an audacious African litigator and human rights-in-tech architect. She is the Managing Partner at Nzili & Sumbi Advocates, a law firm with branches in rural Kenya that centres human rights in the practice of law. As the co-founder of Oversight Lab Africa, she aims to achieve fair and equitable technology across Africa through research and strategic litigation.

She is best known for leading the first transnational litigation against Meta Platforms on behalf of content moderators from across the continent on claims that they were subjected to human trafficking, exploitative working conditions, and psychological trauma.

Mercy is increasingly focused on knowledge transfer and systems-building. She speaks and teaches globally on algorithmic justice, tech-worker rights, and fair tech regulation. She is a Ford Global Fellow 2025 and a TIME100 Next honouree. Her work has been profiled in TIME, Al Jazeera, and the Pulitzer Center, but it is in unions, community barazas, courtrooms, and movement spaces that her impact is most deeply felt.

Michael Markovitz, Director, Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS, South Africa

Michael Markovitz is an adjunct faculty member at the GIBS in Johannesburg and Director of the Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS — an independent research and advocacy platform advancing solutions for African media in support of democracy. As Faculty Lead, he co-designed and launched the inaugural Executive Programme in Media Leadership at GIBS in 2025.

Recognised as one of South Africa's leading experts on media and tech policy, Michael was named among the top 50 alumni of Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies in its first 50 years. In 2023, he convened a landmark global conference at GIBS that adopted Big Tech and Journalism: Principles for Fair Compensation, endorsed by 101 signatories from 28 countries. He has held senior roles in both the public and private sectors, including a five-year term as a board member of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

Nanjira Sambuli – Non-resident Scholar, Tech and International Affairs Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Kenya

Nanjira Sambuli is a researcher, policy analyst, and strategist studying the unfolding, gendered impacts of digitalisation/ICT adoption on governance, diplomacy, media, entrepreneurship, and culture, especially in Africa. Nanjira is a non-resident scholar (and previously a fellow) in the Technology and International Affairs Program at The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and a Ford Global Fellow. She is a board member at Development Gateway, Digital Impact Alliance, a Diplomacy Moderator at the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA), and sits on the International Advisory Board of the EPFL's Essential Tech Centre.

Ninette Mwarania – Manager of Planning, Policy and Research, The Competition Authority of Kenya, Kenya

Ninette K. Mwarania is a dynamic leader driving innovation at the Competition Authority of Kenya. With her expertise in research, strategic planning, and policy development, she plays a pivotal role in shaping competitive landscapes. Ninette passionately champions advocacy and international collaborations, forging powerful partnerships that enhance the Authority's impact. She also leads initiatives in knowledge management, resource mobilization, and performance evaluation, ensuring organizational excellence. Eager to make a difference, Ninette is especially interested in exploring how the competition policy promotes sustainability, paving the way for a greener and more equitable future.

Nora Mbagathi – Executive Director, Katiba Institute, Kenya

Nora Mbagathi is the executive director of Katiba Institute (KI), a Kenyan non-profit organisation that works towards entrenching constitutionalism in Kenya and the wider region, using public interest litigation, research, and civic education. She is a solicitor of England and Wales and an attorney of the New York bar. Prior to taking up her role at KI in Nairobi, Nora was based in London, working as a senior lawyer for the Open Society Justice Initiative. Her background is in technology and human rights, with a focus on non-discrimination and equality. She has worked on cases relating to platform accountability, internet shutdowns, and safeguards in digital public infrastructure. Nora serves on the board of a number of institutions, including the Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) and the Initiative for Digital Public Interest (IDPI).

Nwabisa Makunga – Managing Director, Arena Holdings, South Africa

Nwabisa Makunga is the Managing Director: News & Media at Arena Holdings, overseeing some of South Africa's most influential publications, including the Sunday Times, Business Day and Sowetan. In this role, she is responsible for shaping the strategic direction of these platforms, ensuring they remain trusted voices in a fast changing media landscape.

Central to her mandate is the use of data, both as a tool to guide editorial and commercial decision-making, and as a driver of innovation in reaching and serving audiences. She is responsible for leveraging insights to deepen audience engagement, strengthen journalism, and unlock new revenue opportunities that secure the long-term sustainability of quality journalism. Makunga is a former Editor in Chief of Sowetan and The Herald. She is the former Chairperson of SANEF.

Odanga Madung – Co-founder & Managing Director, Odipo Dev, Kenya

Odanga Madung is the co-founder and Managing Director at Odipo Dev, a research, impact, and media advisory firm operating out of Nairobi, Kenya. Odanga is also an established journalist. Sought out as a skilled investigator in mis/disinformation and tech platforms' harmful practices, he has become one of the foremost experts on these topics in Africa. Odanga recently became a Research Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School and currently serves on the board of the DW Akademie. He was also a former Senior Researcher for Global Elections at Mozilla, and you can find his latest writing on CNN, WIRED, and The Guardian, where he's a columnist.

Ompha Tshamano, Programme and Research Manager, Media Leadership Think Tank, GIBS, South Africa

Ompha Tshamano is the Programme and Research Manager at the GIBS Media Leadership Think Tank, where he leads research and advocacy on media sustainability, digital rights, and competition in Africa's digital economy. With an LLM in Socioeconomic Rights from the University of Pretoria, he brings expertise in navigating complex regulatory environments and advancing inclusive policy frameworks. Ompha has worked with the Centre for Human Rights and the South African Human Rights Commission, focusing on media freedom, governance, and digital inclusion. He coordinates multi-country initiatives and contributes to regional efforts across Africa and the Global South. A committed human rights advocate, Ompha is passionate about using media to promote accountability, empower marginalised communities, and shape equitable access to information and technology.

Adv Pansy Tlakula – Chairperson, Information Regulator, South Africa

Adv. Tlakula studied a Bachelor of Law (B.Proc) at the University of the North (now known as the University of Limpopo), Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) before completing her Master's in Law (LL.M) at Harvard University. She also holds a Doctorate in Legal Studies (Honoris Causa) from the Vaal University of Technology. She has held several influential positions. Advocate Tlakula was a member of the South African Human Rights Commission from 1995 until 2002. She was appointed as the Chief Electoral Officer of the Electoral Commission of South Africa from 2002 to 2011.

In 2011, she was appointed as the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of South Africa until 2014. She was appointed in 2005 as a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). She served the ACHPR for 12 years, until November 2017. She held the mandate of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, and between 2015 and 2017, she served as Chairperson of the ACHRP. She is currently a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and she was recently appointed as a member of the SADC Electoral Advisory Committee.

Paula Miraglia – Executive Director and co-founder, Momentum – Journalism & Tech Task Force, Brasil

Paula Miraglia is the founder and CEO of Momentum – Journalism & Tech Task Force and publisher of Gama Revista. She co-founded and directed Nexo Jornal for eight years. Paula holds a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of São Paulo, where she also completed her master's and undergraduate studies in Social Sciences. She is a Sulzberger Fellow at Columbia University. She serves on the boards of the Center for News Technology and Innovation, the International Press Institute, Instituto de Referência Negra Peregum, Brazilian Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and Data Privacy Brasil.

Richard Gingras – Centre for News, Technology and Innovation, and Village Media, USA

Richard Gingras is chair of the board at Village Media, whose "community impact platforms" and local newsrooms seek to strengthen the communities they serve. He is also a founder and board member of the Center for News, Technology, and Innovation, a think-and-do tank for the role of journalism in modern societies.

Gingras served for many years as global vice president of news at Google focusing on how news was presented on Google's consumer services and on Google's efforts to enable a healthy, open ecosystem for quality journalism. He serves on the boards and advisory councils of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the International Center for Journalists, the First Amendment Coalition, the James W Foley Legacy Foundation, the UC Berkeley School of Journalism, PRX, the public radio exchange, and the Frontline documentary series.

Sbu Ngalwa – Treasurer General, South African National Editors' Forum, South Africa

Sibusiso 'Sbu' Ngalwa is a journalist/editor with over 20 years' experience. Sbu has previously held a number of senior positions at various media organisations, including as the Editor in Chief at Eyewitness News (EWN), Editor-in-Chief at the Daily Dispatch & DispatchLive, and Politics Editor at the Sunday Times. He has also previously worked as a Parliamentary Correspondent for Independent Newspapers and as Politics Editor at Newzroom Afrika. He is a columnist and a regular commentator on socio-political and media-related issues. He served for two terms as the Chairperson of the SA National Editors Forum (SANEF). He is the Treasurer General of SANEF and currently chairs the SANEF Journalism Sustainability Fund - an initiative to raise funding and sustain public interest journalism in South Africa. He also serves as the acting Secretary General of the continental editors' body, The African Editors' Forum (TAEF).

Prof Thompson Chengeta – Professor of International Law and Artificial Intelligence Technologies, Liverpool John Moores University, United Kingdom

Prof Thompson Chengeta is a full Professor of International Law and Artificial Intelligence Technologies at Liverpool John Moores University. He is the Principal Investigator of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Study on human rights implications of AI in Africa. He is a board member of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Body on Disarmament Matters and a board member of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Matters. He is an expert member of the UNICEF Expert Advisory Board on AI and the rights of children. Prof Chengeta is a Commissioner with the Global Commission on Responsible AI in the Military Domain. He also serves as a legal expert for the International Committee for Robot Arms Control and was a legal expert member of the International Panel on the Regulation of Autonomous Weapons. He is a registered Legal Practitioner with the High Court, Supreme Court, and Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe. Previously, Prof Chengeta served as legal counsel in the Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Court. Prof Chengeta holds a LLD (International law and AI) from the University of Pretoria, a Master of Law from Harvard Law School, a Master of Human Rights from the University of Pretoria, LLB (Bachelor of Laws) from Midlands State University and reads for a Master's in AI Ethics and Society at the University of Cambridge. For 15 years, Prof Chengeta is the author of the hypothetical cases of the Nelson Mandela World Human Rights Moot Court Competition organised by the Centre for Human Rights and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Sha'ista Goga – Director, Acacia Economics, South Africa

Sha'ista Goga is a Director of Acacia Economics and is an economist focused on competition policy and regulation with an interest in digital markets. Sha'ista has provided advice to regulators, multilateral organisations and stakeholders across Africa in relation to digital markets, ICT, financial services and energy. Sha'ista is also a Research Fellow at the Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development (CCRED) at the University of Johannesburg and a Visiting Researcher at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has engaged in academic research on the regulation of digital markets, including leading a project on the regulation of digital markets for the Industrial Development Think Tank at CCRED. Sha'ista holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of the Witwatersrand (with distinction) as well as a Master of Philosophy in Economics from Oxford University, where she was a Rhodes Scholar. Sha'ista previously served as a Part-time Member at the Competition Tribunal of South Africa.

Dr Shikoh Gitau – Chief Executive Officer, Qhala, Kenya

Dr Shikoh is the CEO of Qhala, a Digital Innovation company driving Africa's digital transformation. With over a decade of experience in emerging markets, she has led innovation across Agriculture, Education, Health, Payments, Retail, and Renewable Energy.

She founded Safaricom Alpha, Africa's first corporate innovation hub, serving as Chief Innovation Officer and leading Safaricom's digital shift. At the African Development Bank, she guided governments in ICT adoption and co-authored the Digital Government Blueprint. Her experience at Google and Microsoft strengthened her ability to bridge business, government, and technology. Dr Shikoh advises governments on data and digital policies, sits on the boards of WiDEF, Longhorn, Open Institute, ANU, and IPSL, and contributes to steering committees and think tanks shaping Africa's digital future. Holding a PhD and MSc in Computer Science from the University of Cape T own, she is a Women in STEM Champion committed to empowering women and building Africa's startup ecosystem.

Dr Tabani Moyo – Regional Director, Media Institute of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe

Dr Tabani Moyo is the Regional Director (Southern Africa) for the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). He is a member of the African Union Working Group on AI, which was established in 2019 and developed the African Union Strategy on Artificial Intelligence. He was one of the global committee members who helped develop an AI charter for the media, led by RSF. The 23-member committee is chaired by Maria Ressa, the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Dr. Moyo also advises governments and multilateral organisations on freedom of expression, access to information, and media freedom. He sits on regional, continental, and global boards. He is an extraordinary researcher at the University of North West, South Africa, and an Adjunct Lecturer at the ESAMI Business School in Arusha, Tanzania.

Prof Vukosi Marivate, Chair of Data Science and Professor of Computer Science, the University of Pretoria, South Africa

Prof. Vukosi Marivate is Chair of Data Science and Professor of Computer Science at the University of Pretoria, where he leads the Data Science for Social Impact group. His research focuses on Machine Learning (ML), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Natural Language Processing (NLP), particularly for African and other low-resource languages. He co-founded Lelapa AI, the Masakhane Research Foundation, and the Deep Learning Indaba. His work spans social challenges in science, energy, public safety, and utilities, aiming to create AI for Africans by Africans.

Wahyu Dhyatmika – Chairperson, Indonesian Cyber Media Association, Indonesia

Wahyu Dhyatmika is the chairperson of the Indonesian Cyber Media Association (AMSI) and CEO of Tempo Digital. Previously, he served as editor-in-chief for Tempo Weekly News Magazine from 2019 to 2021. AMSI has more than 500 online media members across Indonesia.

Wahyu believes in journalism as public good and a key component in a healthy and robust information ecosystem. He experiments with different forms of citizen reporting (crowdsourcing) and data-driven investigative reporting to better serve the public in the digital landscape. He led the Panama Papers reporting in Indonesia in 2015, and in 2017, along with several other editor-in-chiefs of independent media in Indonesia, founded IndonesiaLeaks.id, a platform for whistle-blowers.

In 2018, Wahyu was involved in the creation of CekFakta.com, the first collaborative fact-checking initiative in Indonesia. He also started a fact-checking project at Tempo, a community reporting project called Tempo Witness, and initiated a platform for public complaints called Lapor Tempo. He was a Nieman Fellowship recipient (Harvard University) in 2014.

Yvonne Mhango – Africa Economist, Bloomberg, South Africa

Yvonne Mhango is the Africa Economist at Bloomberg Economics, based in Johannesburg. With nearly two decades of experience, she has delivered in-depth economic analysis and forecasts on African economies, supporting institutional investors and pan-African corporates in making informed strategic decisions. Before joining Bloomberg, Yvonne served as Head of Africa Research and Africa Economist at Renaissance Capital and as Chief Economist at Equity Bank. She holds a Master's degree in Business Science (Economics) from the University of Cape Town.

Zenzele Ndebele – Founder and Director, Centre for Innovation and Technology, Zimbabwe

Zenzele Ndebele is a Zimbabwean journalist and media innovator who has positioned Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the centre of newsroom transformation in Africa. He is the founder and director of the Centre for Innovation & Technology (CITEZW), an online media house in Bulawayo that pioneered the use of AI in journalism. In 2023, CITEZW introduced Alice, one of Southern Africa's first AI-generated news anchors, who co-hosts programmes with Ndebele and delivers daily news.

Beyond avatars, he champions AI as a tool to strengthen journalism workflows—streamlining transcription, subtitling, SEO, and audience engagement—while emphasising that human reporters remain essential to investigative storytelling and community-driven reporting. Ndebele's work also bridges AI with media literacy: he has trained communities to resist disinformation and is currently collaborating with DW on developing an AI and media literacy module. With a BA in Media Studies and an MSc in Journalism, Ndebele continues to shape the future of AI-powered journalism in Africa.

Zoé Titus – Executive Director, Namibia Media Foundation, Namibia

Zoé Titus is a prominent advocate for media freedom and social justice, with nearly three decades of leadership in advancing independent journalism, access to information, and democratic governance across Africa. She serves as the Executive Director of the NMT Media Foundation and holds the chairpersonship of both the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI). Her work spans national, continental, and global arenas - driving legal reform, shaping inclusive media policy, and championing the sustainability of public interest media, particularly in the Global South.