

Du Plessis said the client – or the reader – deserves paramount attention, and “client-driven journalism” that keeps a close watch on the market is essential for the survival of the press and the only guarantee for future press freedom.

A reporter on Business Day and a reporter on the Sowetan may cover the same press conference and return with entirely different stories, he said. “As long as they were both accurate, balanced and honest, I have no problem with that. Indeed, it is to be applauded. It would be evidence of reporters working their respective markets and giving up forever the notion that any newspaper is the mass communicator to all people anymore.”

A successful media in these terms would be one that is market-driven, that is closely attuned to the needs and demands of its clients and that selects news accordingly.

Chairperson Prof Gavin Stewart of the Rhodes University journalism department referred to another model of the media in citing a popular dictum – the mark of a successful press is its ability to survive changes in government. Such a media, it is implied, would preserve and present the truth, however unpalatable, “unmarketable” or untenable it might be to the reader or client.

A similar distinction was also made by Slabbert when he posed a question to the journalists present – do they seek a press that has a democratic preference or one that is driven by patronage?

Dr Alex Boraine, Idasa’s executive director, summed up the dilemma with an example of the media coverage of Codesa. “Many newspapers imagined Codesa would solve all our problems and in seeking to comfort and bring good news avoided the warning signs. When the collapse came, it was a shock; the public was not prepared for it. It is almost as if to sell news the media must sensationalise the truth and keep the bad news away. Yet this is a white perception, a comfort perception.”

He concluded with a strong call on the South African media to fulfill its obligation to inform the public and to demonstrate its commitment to the principle of the public’s right to know: “By all means give people some good news, and keep their hope alive, but above all tell them what they need to know. The majority of South Africans, whites in particular, are not informed, and whose responsibility is it to keep them informed if not the media’s?”

Maira Levy is media facilitator with Idasa’s media department.

Dakarites look back on event which nudged SA to negotiations

From July 9 to 12, 1987 a group of mainly white, mainly Afrikaans speaking South Africans met members of the ANC in exile in Dakar, Senegal at a conference which provoked widespread angry reaction from the National Party establishment.

According to some, the Dakar meeting was the start of the current negotiations process, even the turning point which led up to De Klerk’s memorable February 2, 1990 address. Others, while not necessarily according it such significance, still regard it as a memorable event, both personally and politically. Here are the views of some of those who attended that meeting five years ago.

By SUE
VALENTINE

Van Zyl Slabbert:

“It is always tempting to seize on an event that your organisation has been responsible for and present it as a major cause of subsequent events. Some people, not even involved with Idasa, have tended to do so when referring to the Dakar meeting.

“I have just been to Dakar, five years later, to help found the Gorée Institute for Democracy, Development and Culture – a direct consequence of the 1987 meeting. This coincided with the preliminary meetings of the OAU and listening to politicians, journalists and academics from different African countries discuss developments over the last five years, Dakar 1987 frequently cropped up.

“ANC executive members have ascribed seminal importance to this event, as well as one or two cabinet ministers of the current government. I am satisfied that Dakar 1987 was an event that, within the combination of historical situations at the time, helped nudge the balance of forces towards negotiation in South Africa.

“It certainly put Idasa on the map and helped us to, so much better, do the kind of work we had hoped to do from the outset.”

Five yea



Together in Dakar in 1987: Lindiwe M

Alex Boraine:

“In 1987, the politics of coercion and co-optation held full sway. Negotiation politics was not an option. The ANC and others were banned and exiled organisations were demonised and marginalised.

“Despite the current impasse, however, in 1992 South Africa has moved into the negotiations mode. It is certain that the meetings between the ANC and the group of whites in Dakar at least made a modest contribution in the direction of negotiation politics. The crunch question, with *whom* do you negotiate, was also more urgently asked as a consequence of the Dakar initiative.

“In Dakar we faced three major areas: the use of violence, a new democratic constitution and the need for an economic policy which addressed both growth and equity.

“Ironically all of these questions remain on the top of the agenda. Idasa’s role in 1987 was to facilitate – a start was made. Clearly there remains much more to do.”

For **TRUDIE DE RIDDER** the meeting at Dakar resulted in the loss of a job (a state employer revoked her appointment as head of department because she was a “political terrorist”) but at the same time it propelled her into further study and work within the black community of Lentegour in Cape

on, Dakar's questions remain



de Ridder, Barbara Masekela and Grethe Fox

Town. Of her memories of Dakar Ms De Ridder says: "Dakar had an enormous influence. It was a turning point in our lives and gave us the courage to continue with things we believed in. Dakar was a high! It was unbelievable, the human relations that were formed there. Looking back, it all seems very idealistic within our present situation and all the violence. But one of the questions that kept on cropping up at Dakar was, what are the people going to do with their anger? The violence is enormously disappointing, but it is a form of expression of this anger."

Dutch Reformed Church dominee **THEUNS ELOFF** also received a hostile reception when he returned from Dakar. Church authorities placed certain ultimatums before him, forcing him to weigh these up against what he wanted to do as a minister of the church. He broke off contact with "progressive" organisations during this period and fought against the allegations of treachery and similar charges from within the church congregation. However, when he approached the church council early in 1989 to discuss renewing his contact with political organisations, their response was that 10 years hence might be an appropriate time!

Eloff resigned and in 1989 joined the Consultative Business Movement.

"During the past three years I have been involved in more interesting things than many people experience in a lifetime and for that I'm thankful. Dakar was not only a political, but also a personal milestone. It pushed me into the field I'm now in.

"Politically, obviously we have come a long way since Dakar. We feel Dakar has not yet been fully appreciated. It was a groundbreaking meeting. The cracks in the National Party outfit were starting to show and although PW (Botha) successfully ostracised all the Afrikaners who went to Dakar, he did not break the spirit of Dakar.

"We have come a long way since then. If Codesa 2 had been successful we could have said that these have been the five good years after Dakar...It was easy to be statesman-like when things went well, now they're not so good, but conditions are more difficult, more testing and we'll have to wait and see."

ANDRÉ DU TOIT, political scientist and deputy chairperson of Idasa's board of trustees, commented as follows:

"...Dakar was extremely important and had a great impact on me. In the overall context it was not the first nor the only venture of its kind, but in terms of putting the issue on the public and international agenda it was one of the most important. It made the

government take note.

"One doesn't know to what extent this happened, the inside stories haven't yet been written, but my guess would be that Dakar would figure prominently in unfolding events."

JACQUES KRIEL, a former medical doctor and now deputy principal at the Sacred Heart College, said:

"To me it seemed as if it was the final straw that broke the P W Botha back - the floodgates opened in terms of communication.

"Looking back I think we mismanaged our return. We were not well enough informed as to the mood at home...We should not have listened to the advice to come in through the back door at the airport. We missed an opportunity to make a statement about what we had done and that it was nothing that required secrecy."

PIERRE CRONJE, former Democratic Party MP and now with the ANC, said:

"Whether people make history or history makes people is an old debate, but a number of people cite the Dakar meeting as a turning point event which paved the way for the De Klerk speech.

"Dakar was the meeting that broke the monotonous circle of repression and revolt, in a sense it was the start of the negotiation process...

"Dakar helped to consolidate thoughts in the ANC and the Afrikaner 'dissident' camp at the time. Links were made then that have lasted."

His former DP colleague, **PETER GASTROW**, said, politically, Dakar was the real beginning of a momentum towards negotiations. "From then on, rhetoric came down from the theoretical to the possible and practical implementations. It was an ice-breaking meeting, negotiations were now no longer a far-fetched notion.

For former Idasa staffer **IAN LIEBENBERG**, who was based at Stellenbosch at the time, Dakar had important symbolic value.

"It was very necessary at that stage to make a change from the whole political environment of the 'total onslaught'. It had great symbolic value because for the first time white South Africans and Afrikaners took the step to identify openly with the negotiations option. We never claimed that we were beginning negotiations, but made it clear that any future option lay in negotiation and not coercion."

Sue Valentine is media co-ordinator with Idasa.