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“Think Tank” A First Step Toward 2007 World Summit
by David Kleeman, American Center for Children and Media

“The Summit is like the Olympics; it has to showcase the best.” With these words, Firdoze Bulbulia, Chair of the Children and Broadcasting Foundation for Africa, opened an informal “Think Tank” to propose and develop themes for the Fifth World Summit on Media for Children. “We need to spend the next years finding, brainstorming and workshopping the world’s best ideas.”

The 2007 Summit will take place in South Africa, with an overall theme of “Media as a Tool for Global Peace and Democracy.”

It’s still early in the development process, but Benjy Francis, Executive Director of South Africa’s Afrika Cultural Centre, noted, “we don’t really have two-and-a-half years; everything has to be ready much earlier.” He added, “South African tradition is to discuss issues and reach consensus.”

CBFA organized this international roundtable to make the most of friends and colleagues gathered for SITHENGI – one of Africa’s largest media festivals and markets. Young people and media producers from throughout Africa would already be present for CBFA’s children’s workshop, an annual part of SITHENGI.

Still, this is not just an African Summit, but a World Summit taking place in Africa. It is an invaluable opportunity to share African culture and develop the African media market, but must also deal with themes, situations and issues of global need. Therefore, CBFA added a small selection of international experts, both newcomers and those who had attended previous Summits, diverse in geographic and professional representation.

Think Tank participants were challenged with the question of how to organize a coherent, fair and relevant Summit in a world where the issues, challenges and opportunities are so different from place to place.

Their answer: focus on content. The need for good content exists across all technologies, knows no cultural boundaries, and is common to developed and developing media markets. Further, building around issues of developing strong content opens the door to many other recommendations raised in the meeting, such as:

- Focus on production models that are sustainable economically and culturally, such as co-production and exchange;
- Encourage proper attention to child and adolescent development in program development;
- Engage research and education experts;
- Deal honestly with the creative and economic tensions between the producer and the broadcaster;
- Discuss which kinds of content travel well and which don't, a key issue for funding;
- As more countries in the world look at some form of government oversight of children's media, consider ways in which regulation can support good content without intruding on creativity.

Adolescents at the CBFA Sithengi workshop held their own "Think Tank" on the Fifth Summit. Africa has been a leader in bringing young voices to the previous Summits, and the teens wanted to ensure that their 2007 participation wouldn't be window dressing.

Teens and adults alike agreed that children need their own substantive discussions, creative exercises and production workshops. They should be able to try new things or refine existing skills, in ways that promote exchange among youth of different cultures. At times, the adults and adolescents will come together, but the teens need a realistic understanding that the Summit is a professional conference at which youth-made media is only one aspect.

As a next step, CBFA will develop a simple survey to find out people's interests regarding the 2007 World Summit. The survey should be available shortly after the first of the year, to be completed online, or on paper and faxed to the CBFA. People who attended the Think Tank will circulate the survey worldwide, asking those who receive it also to forward the questionnaire to others interested in the Summit.

"The survey will serve two purposes," according to Firdoze Bulbulia. "It will let us gather important information and ideas from a wide range of professionals – in media, education, NGOs, government, and more. It will also serve as the first marketing message from the Fifth World Summit, reminding people to plan to attend and emphasizing that we are building the meeting around real needs and interests."

To be added to the Summit e-mail list, or for more information, contact cbfa@icon.co.za