

Cartoonists protest as MISA announces new awards

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Cartoonists and online publishers have cried foul after the Malawi chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Malawi) announced the inclusion of five more categories for the 2012 NAMISA Annual Media Awards. The media groups said MISA-Malawi should not have left them out because they are also at the heart of media products worldwide.



The body has already started calling for entries from its interested paid up members to submit their published works for awards, which are handed out on 3 May annually as part of [World Press Freedom Day](#) (WPFD) celebrations.

Addition of awards

The five fresh categories supported by different partners to uplift the quality and standards of online journalism and national development in general are, Best Farm Radio Programme for Radio; Best Human Resource for Health (for both the Print and Electronic); Talk Show Host of the Year (electronic); Blogger of the Year and Columnist of the Year (print media).

In a statement issued on 6 March 2012, MISA-Malawi says these awards will be offered annually and will form part of the repertoire of the NAMISA annual awards.

One of Malawi's prolific cartoonists, M'theto Lungu, who runs his cartoon strips in different publications as Lip Smile, said that he is not happy that they [cartoonists] have been excluded from eligible entrants to the awards.

"I believe that MISA can do better. If they approached some quarters of our society they can equally find funds to honor cartoonists as they can find for bloggers," said Lungu.

MISA-Malawi chairperson, Anthony Kasunda responded that at least the media fraternity should pat them on the back for securing funding for extra five categories.

"Columnist, talk show and blogger are some of the new categories. NAMISA has done tremendous job to secure these

awards and definitely, cartoonist and online are our priority and any opportunity for a new sponsor will go towards awarding our deserving artists and online media practitioners," he said in an interview with Bizcommunity.

The power of cartoons

Lungu said the cartoon-journalism, in other ways, is more effective as it can also meet the grassroots' levels of understanding and that this is why most messages for the majority rural masses are mainly illustrated.

"I am not happy because the other major voice that represents Malawi and its dynamic culture is been ignored. I think we need to realise that no newspaper can make it without cartoons since the readership is growing diverse and reaching out to rural people, most of whom cannot decipher the written word," argued Lungu who is also Malawi's central region coordinator and executive committee member in the yet to be launched Cartoonists and Illustrators Association (CIAs).

He said cartoons are the best media you can ever find.

"We want that added to the awards, otherwise the said promotion of diversity in media freedom is been challenged here!" argued Lungu.

Lungu said MISA-Malawi should have realised that cartoons have and keep shaping peoples morals.

"They check on politicians and other key peoples behaviors. Most people refrain from doing wrong things for fear of appearing in cartoons. I think we help fight poor governance, breach of the rule of law, financial mismanagement, and poor leadership at all levels in political, private, and individual and CSO circles. With the same sharp blade, we bring joy to many faces and strongly educate in an acceptable soft manner," explained Lungu.

He said this is not a small feat and the only appreciation is to have them recognised in form of awards.

Impact of cartoons

"You can also recall the power of cartoons to shift paradigm or set agenda. Do you remember the Dutch cartoon that brought the Islamic world to anger, and again, the many that locally have helped avert immoral and oppressive tendencies?" queried Lungu.

Adding, "We describe an issue in a witty but powerful simple way. We represent over a 1 000 words with just one simple but meaningful impression."

Most journalists in the country have however asked the cartoonists and online publishers to allow the current arrangement to proceed.

What the judges are looking for

Commenting on the newly introduced awards, MISA-Malawi said judges for these new awards will look for a number of attributes.

For the Best Farm Radio programme, since agriculture is the backbone of Malawi's economy, the award will honor agricultural broadcasters who provide excellent radio programs aimed at transforming the lives of small holder farmers.

"The radio programs should be gender sensitive, relevant and responsive to Malawi's development challenges, in line with broadcasting standards and must not exceed 30 minutes".

On the Best Human Resource for Health, the award calls for stories and features that highlight issues related to Human Resources for Health (HRH) from the patient; health worker, student; community; government; NGO working on the ground

in health care service delivery and donor perspectives.

The stories should be informative and analyse current trends and issues in human resources for health citing pre-service training outputs; challenges in attraction, retention and deployment of healthcare workers in both rural and urban health facilities; rural and urban imbalances and inequalities in accessing health care services; advocate for policy development, implementation, monitoring as well as track and monitor HRH policy, plans and funding by government and development partners.

It will also be for such stories that will capture innovative ideas and solutions to challenges of human resources for health access and retention at all levels of health care service delivery; monitor and analyse the political environment and impact on HRH.

On the Talk Show Host of the Year, Blogger of the Year and Columnist of the Year, the awards will recognise journalistic outputs that provide thought provoking analysis and appeal to a cross section of the populace.

In these categories all paid up MISA-Malawi members will be required to vote or nominate their respective winners and send the same to namisaawards@yahoo.com on or before Saturday 31 March 2012.

"Only Malawian talk show hosts, bloggers and columnists are eligible for these awards," says the statement from MISA-Malawi.

Remaining categories unchanged

The five awards adds up to the traditional MISA-Malawi annual awards, which are Hunger and Poverty: Print and Electronic; Universal Primary Education: Print and Electronic; Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Print and Electronic; Child Mortality: Print and Electronic; Maternal Health: Print and Electronic, HIV and AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis: Print and Electronic; Environmental Sustainability: Print and Electronic; Global Partnerships for Development: Print and Electronic; Investigative Journalist of the Year: Print and Electronic; Photojournalist of the Year; Business and Economics Journalist of the Year: Print and Electronic; Education Journalist of the Year: Print and Electronic; Human Rights Journalist of the Year: Print and Electronic; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Journalist of the Year: Print and Electronic; Sports Journalist of the Year as well as Chichewa Journalist of the Year.

Annually MISA Malawi also recognises the Overall winner, Life-time achiever, Print Media House of the Year and Electronic Media House of the Year.

MISA-Malawi also announced that the Awards Committee will accept entries published between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012. The deadline for receiving entries is 31 March and that applicant may submit a maximum of two entries per category.

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