

Someone is watching Kenya's media

In the last four months, Jackal News has broken all barriers and become the source of news and gossip on the happenings in the Kenyan media space. Carole Kimutai caught up with Bogonko Bosire, who says he owns news and gossip, asked him about media in Kenya and China investing in media.

By [Carole Kimutai: @CaroleKimutai](#) 16 Jan 2012



Who is this man called Bogonko Bosire?

I am a person who wants to liberalise and "democratise" the media space. I see information as power and the more we can put information in people's hands the better they are at making decisions and bettering their lives so to speak. Technology has made this possible and we must hand this power back to the people. Basically, what you see is what you get and if the society can trust me, together we shall grow to levels hitherto unimagined.

Do you see yourself as a media revolutionary?

I have been called many things and a revolutionary is a new sort of a romantic addition to it. However, I do not see myself as a revolutionary; I find myself as advantaged and being a player in a "revolutionary" period in the development of the media space. We have seen great expansion in communication. Digital has revolutionized communication and how we communicate so I am only taking advantage of the on-going revolution in communication.

How do you describe your writing style? What influences it?

I've tried to describe it to many people and all I can say is I don't know. It just flows from me. I am a sensitive person and the greater I feel about an issue the stronger I will write about. There are so many issues that touch a lot of people adversely and those drive me to write about things. People's suffering affects me greatly and I like exposing these. People's greed and unfairness also gets me ticked off and gets my juices flowing.

How do you define the Jackal website? Is it a news or a gossip website?

Jackal is a place where people come to get empowered with news and information that touches on their lives. We avoid gossip, we verify our information and the unfortunate thing is that the people whom we sort of rub the wrong way by being blunt and truthful, would like to categorise us as a gossip column because we take no prisoners.

You have concentrated a lot on the Kenyan media. Why?

Kenya is a regional powerhouse. If we can sort out Kenya, we can sort out a huge chunk of Africa and that's what my plans are, starting with Kenya and moving out to the rest of Africa, technology makes this possible.

■ You have a slogan that says "Because I own news and gossip. You are either a source of news or a target." What is the thinking behind this phrase?

We take no prisoners, no news is too hot for us to handle no person is too big for us to tackle. I have taken on the high and mighty and I have paid the price. I have been accosted, beaten up by hired hoodlums and thugs but I will not give up trying to expose the rot in my society. And since we are fearless, people come to us with what at first appears as gossip but we develop these leads into stories.

■ Why did you launch the website? And why in 2011?

To give news to people who are not getting it from the so called traditional news sources. 2011 is just an accident of history, it has no significance.

■ The website is barely 12 months since it was launched. What have you achieved so far?

We have been at the forefront in breaking news that have been picked up by both local and international news channels. We have been ranked as one of the most visited websites in Kenya over and above many sites with resources we can only dream of. We have an international audience and more importantly, we are trying to keep the Kenyan media in check. According to several software programmes, we hover around 10 000 hits a day and we are working to increase the number. That is why in due course, we will be migrating to a new professionally designed and market friendly website.

■ You have been very active on social media. How has this helped in your website's marketing strategy?

Social media has opened up the space for a lot of people and news agencies such as the Jackal which have limited marketing budgets. So apart from word of mouth, social media is one of our biggest marketing tools at the moment.

■ Is this a first time project for you?

This is not my first project, I've handled a lot of huge media projects for many organisations. I worked for AFP where I handled sensitive projects such as the comprehensive peace agreement for South Sudan; I've interviewed several African leaders, Hollywood celebrities and sports personalities.

A few years ago, I broke several stories after interviewing the late Sudan rebel leader John Garang Demabior; Sudan vice president Osman Hassan Ali Taha, the late LRA deputy rebel leader Vincent Otti, Hollywood actors, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, US singer Harry Belafonte, the late Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai among others.

■ What do you want to achieve by "watching the watchman"?

Media is a very powerful institution in Africa and of course the world over. It has been infiltrated by elements that have dubious and questionable intents, media in Africa only does the bidding of big industry, big politics and their own bidding as opposed to being the people's watchdog so we must get someone to keep media in check so that they can do their work, of keeping the other arms (judiciary, executive, parliament) of government in check.

■ In the last few months you have posted stories on your website like Citizen TV news

anchor, Janet Mbugua earning KSh 800 000, the mass exodus of journalists to CCTV and most recent the plans by media mogul SK Macharia to buy a chopper. How do you get your tips and how reliable are your sources?

My sources are impeccable. A story like that of Janet Mbugua, touch on the credibility of media and what goes into bringing news to your doorstep. The disparity in pay between the person who goes out to gather the news and the face that presents the news is an on-going battle in many newsrooms across the world. We need to have that debate here as well and expose any injustices in the workplace wherever they are are being practiced. The Citizen TV newsroom is not an exception and we will not stop with Janet. If you look at CCTV, the story is not about journalists moving from local stations to an international one, it is the silent un-talked about Chinese policy towards Africa and its "neo-colonial" moves here. The Chinese want to influence what they tell Africa and how African see them and what better way of doing that than using African faces to say and do what the Chinese government wants done or said?

It is said today's gossip is tomorrow's news, why do you think some of these stories you write about are not openly discussed? For example the poor employment structures in some media houses?

The stories may not be openly discussed but the impact is there. For example, when we broke the story of Janet Mbugua, SK Macharia had to quickly re-think his employment policies and when he pays his other staff otherwise he would have had a riot in his hands. The bottom line, many people got a pay hike at Citizen and other newsrooms across the country and that's good.

Have you received any defamation complaints or case courts?

No

As a journalist, what guidelines does your website follow to ensure fairness, accuracy, decency etc. in your reporting?

The Kenya media code of conduct and ethics

Having worked for an international media house, what have you learnt about the practice of journalism?

The world is a global village, there is nothing like international news anymore, everybody is interconnected. What is seen as local news today will become international in a few seconds given technology and how easily a story can go viral.

What is your opinion about Kenyan journalists? What are they good at and what should they be better at?

I have very high regard for Kenyan journalists. However, their working conditions are so tough and this affects how they work. For example, look at the Nation Media Group's *Daily Nation* newspaper, its readership has been between 150 000 and 200 000 people per day for the last 25 years, how realistic is this? Why has this not grown? What is the Nation offering that the market does not like? Is it a problem of stories or the management strategy? How much do they pay their reporters? How can you have someone a correspondent for more than a decade? How well do they train their journalists? Can you imagine, they a reporters and editors to resign if they are pursuing higher education? The list of these adverse working

environments is endless and they cut across all media in Kenya.

▣ *With the Kenyan elections scheduled for this year, what role do you (Jackal News) intend to play especially considering the role the media played in the post election crisis that happened in 2007/8?*

We are working on a strategy for the 2012 elections that we will reveal to you guys in due course.

▣ *From a patriotism point of view, do you think it is something worth celebrating a foreign platform that is coming to tell the African story?*

There is nothing like a foreign platform telling African stories. Foreigners cannot tell the African story. The African story will only be told by Africans using African platforms. These platforms are perpetrating their masters bidding. The Chinese are selling China and the Arabs are selling Arabs. We have had CNN and BBC here in Africa/Kenya for the longest time, when have they ever told the African story, when have they articulated the thinking of the majority of Africans, they are focused on conflict civil strife and anything bad. They grudgingly talk about Africa innovations such as MPesa (Safaricom's mobile money platform), Aids research in Kenya, intellectual powerhouses that are our universities, African business moguls such as Ali Dangote of Nigeria are suddenly so big to avoid.

I am not saying that some of the problems here are not of our own making, but there are so many positive stories here that if say CNN was genuine, they would have a programme daily on African culture, a programme daily on African business, a programme daily on politics and governance. After 20 years of reporting on Africa, CNN does not have a channel focusing on Africa but it has CNN in Arabic, such nerve.

▣ *Having worked for a foreign media house, why has Africa never launched a pan African news organisation yet foreign media houses use Africans to tell the African story?*

African governments and particularly the African Union have not realised the power of the media and how media can be used for development and unifying Africa. But having said that, development and unity are key objectives of African leaders, they are out for their own personal gratification and enriching themselves. They have not even empowered the private sector to do this for them!

▣ *Ten years from now. When you look back at your life and Jackal News, what do you want to see that you will be proud of?*

We will be the biggest and the most trusted news agency in the world articulating the African vision.

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