



# Mobile journalism leads to opportunities and changes in Zimbabwe

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“Social media gives Mugabe a headache” reads the front page of OneWorld.nl on the 1st of November, 2016. Ordinary citizens have been using social media on a grand scale to make their voices heard and counter the common narrative in mainstream media. The media in Zimbabwe are heavily polarized and centralized in Harare, the capital city. Mainstream media are mostly in the hands of the government with a focus on politics, often ignoring the ordinary citizen. Mobile telephony and access to internet have empowered citizens to vocalize issues that affect their daily lives.

*Written by Nava Maria Verboom*

When Hazel Marimbiza first participated in the Mobile Community Zimbabwe project, she was still in university and had no practical experience. Because of the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe resources at universities are scarce. It is not uncommon for students graduating from four years of journalism to have never touched a camera. Her lecturer at the National University of Science and Technology had introduced the idea of participating in the project. “I was interested in taking part as I knew then that I was being given an opportunity to give a louder voice to those that were being marginalized by our mainstream media.”

Mobile Community Zimbabwe was set up in 2013 by Free Press Unlimited with the objective to contribute to plurality and diversity of news and informative content by training a generation of mobile citizen journalists. Their vision was, and is, to be a voice for communities across Zimbabwe.

With the skills Hazel gained in the training she set out and started producing stories of the people in her community. One of her stories is about women in Matopo, an area in Zimbabwe prone to drought, and therefore poverty and hunger. The women in the community started a jam making project to help them earn a living.

“My husband works in town. He does not bring bread or sugar home because he hardly gets paid,” explains one of the women in the video made by Hazel. “Sometimes the money he gets only

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enables him to come home. When he goes back to work I have to give him money for transport and food.” Some of the women are widows and provide for their children by taking part in the jam-making project; other women are married, but their husbands are unemployed.

Hazel came across the women when chatting with them at a shop. The women mentioned to her that business was not smooth as usual as they faced a lot of challenges growing their crops (watermelons and tomatoes) to make the jam. “Because they kept stressing about the challenges that they face I decided to contact their Member of Parliament and ask him if he is aware of what they are doing and how he helps them since some are widows,” Hazel reasoned. “So I called their Member of Parliament and requested a video interview. He agreed and also said he did not know that there were women involved in such a project in his constituency.”

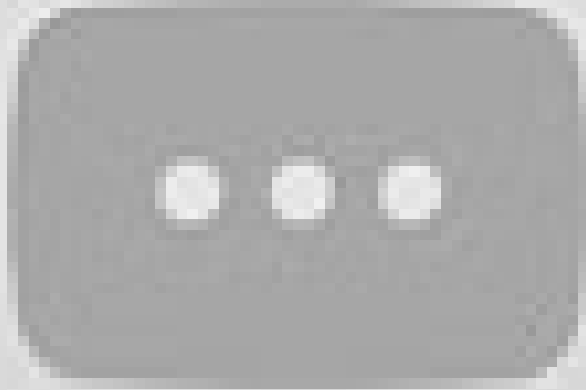
After Hazel's call, Never Khanye, the Member of Parliament for the Matopo North constituency, approached the women and encouraged their activities. He offered them a place where they could work freely. After the video was published he donated a couple of chickens to expand their business.

“This story reflects on how something that some people might want to call a simple mobile phone training has changed not only my life, but that of the people in my community,” Hazel, now an alumnus of Mobile Community Zimbabwe, explained.

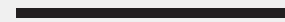
Hazel is only one of many citizen journalists active across the country of Zimbabwe. Mobile Community Zimbabwe trained more than 150 journalists, ranging from students of journalism to professionals already working at media houses. These journalists are trained and spread out back into the country of Zimbabwe.

There are alumni publishing stories online about unemployed men who have gone to the streets and are voluntarily filling the potholes in the road; about sexism and sexual harassment of women at work; about the challenges of living with disabilities; and the list continues. Scrolling through their website gives a 'Humans of New York' feeling: Humans of Zimbabwe. Small local changes happening across the country. Together they can add up to a big national change.

Mobile journalism has opened up a new set of opportunities for media in Zimbabwe, and Mobile Community Zimbabwe has jumped into this niche.



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