About MDI Detailed

What do we do?

The Media Diversity Institute (MDI) works internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity. It aims to prevent the media from intentionally or unintentionally spreading prejudice, intolerance and hatred; encouraging instead, fair, accurate, inclusive and sensitive media coverage in order to promote understanding between different groups and cultures.

This work encourages participation of marginalised voices in the democratic process, creates understanding and the basis for cooperation between communities, reduces social tensions and counters the pernicious influence of partisan journalism and hate speech.

The media all too often promote prejudice and stereotypes or spread inaccurate and misleading information, intentionally or through ignorance, which can lead to discrimination, inequality, intolerance and eventually disputes and violent conflict at the local, national, regional or international level. MDI aims to change this and so prevent tensions and conflicts occurring, or contribute to the healing and reconciliation process in post conflict societies, turning the media instead into a tool for strengthening human rights and democracy.

The rationale

The powerful influence of the media on our societies is well known – it shapes our views and our behaviour. A European Commission study in 2007 showed that, in terms of level of
influence on society, the media rank in third position after parents and education.

Although the media often aggravate divisions in society, exclude moderate and minority voices, and foment conflict, they also possess an enormous capacity to contribute to the solution of these very problems.

People experience diversity in many ways: race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, income, educational background, and so on. Diversity can inspire creativity, social and economic progress, vibrant communities, and a richness of life. All too often, however, diversity engenders suspicion, fear, discrimination, repression, and violent conflict.

Journalists and media organisations hold a unique power to shape our experience of diversity. Through their actions, they can help diverse communities gain visibility and acceptance, or they can exacerbate misunderstanding and create division among different groups and cultures. There are many examples of the media being used to divide communities against themselves, to stir hatreds against minority groups, and directly promote mass violence. The war in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Rwanda are among the more extreme and well known examples of how the media can play a powerful role in tearing apart multi-ethnic communities by inciting ethnic hatred but, in all societies across the world, almost without exception, prejudice, intolerance, and misunderstanding fostered by the media cause various levels of problems and difficulties.

Often diversity is poorly covered not because of particular political agendas, but because journalists are unaware of its implications, or are not professionally equipped to address the issues effectively. In addition, media organisations are often operating within economic constraints that make it difficult to balance the duty to reflect social diversity fairly with the need to retain sizeable mainstream audiences.

It is critically important that the international community explore the potential of the media to prevent misunderstanding, prejudice, intolerance, inequality and conflict. And recognize that the media in fact constitute a major resource with vast potential to help foster tolerance and understanding between different groups and cultures.

How do we do it?
MDI applies a comprehensive and holistic approach of engagement, education and training of all the actors in society who can influence media coverage of diversity. These include:

- Media decision makers: owners, editors, and managers
- Journalists
- Journalism academics and students
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) concerned with diversity issues
- Governmental organisations

MDI employs the following means in order to achieve its goals:

- Media decision-makers conferences bring editors, managers and media owners together to explore the importance of good diversity coverage for the societies that they serve, and to see how a positive approach to diversity makes sound business sense through attracting a broader audience.
Journalism workshops provide theoretical and practical training for journalists on covering diversity, minority and human rights issues. Workshops are always geared towards the production of news features for publication or broadcast, with journalists often working in cross-ethnic or cross-border teams.

Strengthening community media organisations through providing education and training in all basic aspects of running a media organisation.

Introducing Reporting Diversity courses into journalism schools and faculties. The courses are adapted to the local context and are used to introduce the practice and ethos of diversity reporting to potential journalists at the outset of their careers.

Media relations workshops for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) provide theoretical and practical training for CSO representatives on how to use the media to express their views and concerns, and overcome negative and inaccurate portrayals of their communities.

MDI uses the opportunity of its workshops, conferences and other events to bring together media actors and CSO representatives, in order to break down the barriers of misunderstanding that can exist and establish long-term partnerships.

A wide range of manuals and resource materials are produced and published by MDI, and are freely available to anyone who can make good use of them. These publications include: culture-specific Reporting Diversity manuals for journalists and journalism academics; media relations guides; and a comprehensive media monitoring manual.

Conducting research and media monitoring studies to identify problem areas and
recommendations for action.

- Running the Global Media Diversity Network (GMDN), made up of like minded media, governmental and civil society organisations. GMDN partners develop and implement their own projects (sometimes with the involvement of MDI) and exchange advice and experience.

- Provision of a web portal which includes news and resources related to media & diversity and links to like minded organisations around the world, plus networking, blogging and debating facilities, to bring together all those interested in the media & diversity field and allow them to share information, ideas and views.

While incorporating an essential theoretical component, the emphasis in MDI activities is always on a practical and production oriented approach, leading to the production of media content (i.e. print and online articles, and Radio and TV programmes), the development and implementation of Reporting Diversity university courses, or designing media advocacy campaigns for Civil Society Organisations.

All MDI activities always employ local experts, as well as international experts, in order to ensure cultural sensitivity and benefit from local knowledge and experience, and are conducted in the local language.

**Where do we work?**

MDI has worked in Europe, the former Soviet States, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South East Asia.

**Examples of MDI’s work**

See the 'Examples of MDI's Work', 'Current Projects' and 'Completed Projects'sections (on left) for examples of MDI’s past and present work and projects.
Partners

MDI often partners with other major organisations on projects in order to bring together combined experience, knowledge and financial resources. These partners have included: Article 19, the International Federation of Journalists, Internews, Freedom House, the Panos Institute, the British council, and the Council of Europe.

MDI also always partners with local organisations in the countries in which it works in order to ensure projects are culturally sensitive and benefit from local knowledge, experience and contacts. In return, MDI shares expertise with local partners and contributes to their sustainability instead of competing with them.

What people say about us

In 2004 MDI won the ‘British Diversity Award’ for its ‘Finding common ground in Israel - Jewish and Arab journalism students working together’ project. With MDI’s help students from Yizrael Valley College in Nazareth, Israel, worked together to produce a bi-lingual magazine that raised awareness of their different cultures and explored areas of common ground. The magazine was inserted as a supplement in leading Israeli and Palestinian newspapers.

From the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations Analysis on Media Report 2006:

‘Journalistic training is required to reduce ill-informed inter-cultural media reports that repeat stereotypes and emphasize extremes. Modules and full programs in training culturally-informed and sensitive reporting should be developed with the advice of organizations such as the Media Diversity Institute ...’

Comments from the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in 2009:

‘Prior to the seminar, we conducted a landscape scan of the materials and resources that are available online for both media and interfaith practitioners to aid them in their work. We were directed to the Media Diversity Institute’s Reporting Diversity Manual by the UN Alliance of Civilisations. We appreciate the amount of work that was put into this guide and I would like to
thank you, on behalf of ASEF, for making this resource available to the public. It greatly enriched our scan and we have highlighted both the manual (especially the section on religion reporting) as well as the work that the Media Diversity Institute does, in a resource-scan handout that we prepared for the seminar participants.'

Comments from Phil Grosset, a teacher in the UK:

'Thanks and congratulations on your excellent site. I am a teacher at Easingwold School in North Yorkshire, and I regularly use your site for A Level Media Studies. Thanks so much - keep up the good work. I'm sure a lot of other teachers find your site invaluable - it really helps to open the eyes of the students I teach.'

**Organisational structure & staff**

MDI is a charity (non-profit) organisation registered in the UK, headed by a Board of Directors and an Executive Director.

MDI’s staff includes experienced journalists and senior media trainers, who have worked with the BBC, the International Federation of Journalists, UN, EC, Council of Europe, UNESCO, the World Bank and others.

We maintain a small mainly administrative HQ in London where a dedicated team oversees projects implemented from local offices established in the countries where we work.

**Where does our funding come from?**

MDI is funded mainly by governmental and intergovernmental organisations, and also by private foundations. Past and present funders include (for a full list please see the section on Funders):

- The European Commission
- The United Nations Development Programme
- The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- The UK Department for International Development (DFID)
- The US State Department
About MDI Detailed

- The Open Society Institute
- The Sigrid Rausing Trust

MDI History

MDI was born out of the wars in the Balkans. MDI’s Executive Director, Milica Pesic, worked as a journalist for TV Serbia during the 1980s and early 1990s. After refusing to participate in the propaganda machine created by the Serbian regime, she was sacked from her job. Horrified by the unprofessional and unethical way the media fuelled the conflict by increasing tensions between ethnic groups, she decided to setup MDI as a way to prevent the media being used in this way.

From initial work in South East Europe, MDI took its expertise to the volatile Caucasus region, and then to the Middle East and North Africa, and South East Asia. Over the last few years MDI has brought its experience from more troubled regions to address tensions in increasingly diverse Western European societies.

For further information on MDI

Please email us at:

info@media-diversity.org