

‘Before you write about me, walk a mile in my shoes...’



It's not every day that mosquitoes, camels and cats get together to talk about that day's news headlines – but that's what happened in February 2010 at a training course for Moroccan journalists in Tangier, run by the Media Diversity Institute.

The 21-strong group had been divided into teams, assigned an animal and asked to create the front page of a newspaper reporting the news that a powerful developer was about to start work building a luxury holiday complex in an environmentally sensitive area. The developer announced that he was going to use pesticide to kill all of the mosquitoes and offer his guests camel rides – so each animal group had a unique take on the news.

The aim was to encourage the journalists to discuss how they could report this news fairly and accurately, while also expressing their own view of the proposals and reflecting others' perspectives – a challenging task. Taking the discussion out of the human world and into an imaginary one helps the participants think more objectively and creatively about some of the cornerstones of journalism, such as the relationship between different opinions and 'truth', how conflicting viewpoints can be fairly reported, the importance of multiple sources, and the distinction between news and opinion.

This was just one exercises the journalists took part in over three days of intensive training to help them develop their professional skills to better represent diversity in Moroccan society.

The two trainers – Dr Abdelauahab Errami, a Moroccan journalism expert and professor at ISIC and Richard Cookson, a British freelance print and TV journalist – made presentations about the coverage of children, women and the media, reporting on HIV/AIDS, and improving coverage of disability. They also ran interactive exercises that encouraged the participants to think practically about how they can improve their coverage, and helped them identify any prejudices or misunderstandings they may have about minority groups.

A guest speaker, Jamil El Hamdaoui, an Amazigh activist, academic and researcher, spoke about the development of and challenges facing Amazigh newspapers. The journalists also had an opportunity to meet and talk to three representatives of minority groups: an illegal immigrant, a maid and a divorced woman. All three spoke very movingly about the issues they face and reflected on how media coverage of their groups can be improved.

All of the participants will produce their own radio or print features about an issue facing a minority group in Morocco and these will be published and broadcast in the Moroccan media, and will also appear on MDI's website (www.media-diversity.org) .

The workshop is the third of a series of three such workshops that have been organised in Morocco. The workshops form part of the Young Inclusive Journalism Network segment of MDI's two-year programme to promote inclusive journalism in Morocco, which is supported by the UK Embassy in Rabat. For more info contact: mona.elhamdani@media-diversity.org