

Sanef announces science journalism internship programme

Science journalism in South Africa is in a critical need to be developed and invested in. This is according to the South African National Editor's Forum (Sanef) which said this was evident during the recent pandemic. Currently there are a limited number of science journalists in the mainstream media in South Africa.



Source: www.pixabay.com

Development

In order to develop science journalism in South Africa, Sanef, in collaboration with the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SASTA), a business unit of the National Research Foundation and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) are launching a Science Journalism Internship Programme. This initiative will support mainstream media in South Africa.

“There is significant potential for growth in the quantity and impact of science coverage both in mainstream media and community media in South Africa. Many dedicated science journalists who previously specialised in the science and technology beat are no longer working full time for the mainstream media and some of the science desks have been discontinued,” says SASTA managing director, Dr Mamoeletsi Mosia.



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“Many science journalists are working as freelancers and in a community media the availability of science journalism capacity is even lower,” she added.

Some of the challenges that have been identified in research studies on science journalism in South Africa have included: the lack of investment and budget of media organisation to support science journalism, the industry being under-resourced in terms of science journalism skills, the complexity of the relationship between scientists and journalists, and the low appetite for publishing and buying science news articles, amongst others.

Trustworthy news

“The demand for honest and trustworthy scientific news stories has been more pronounced since the outbreak of Covid-19. South Africans had trust that journalists would dig and find accurate information about the plague and educate intended audiences as they researched more about the virus. As SANEF, we believe it is time the media reinvest in the education and growth of scientific writers in this country,” said Sbu Ngalwa Sanef chairman.

The internship programme will be roll out in phases and in phase one, the interns will be placed within the *SABC*. The successful applicants will work in *SABC* newsrooms across the country, to produce science, technology and innovation stories for broadcasts and online media.

The South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement will also partner with other media outlets including *Media24, Newsroom Afrika and EWN*. The aim is to partner with multiple mainstream media outlets through this initiative and in 2023 the internship will be expanded to even add more mainstream media outlets in South Africa.

In 2016 SAASTA signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Media Development and Diversity Agency to introduce a similar science journalism developmental programme in the community media space. The project has continuously enhanced the science journalism capacity in the community media in all nine provinces, as it has been rare for the community media to cover science and technology stories in the past. This project currently has community media partners in all nine provinces and currently employs twenty-eight science journalism volunteers. The aim is to expand it to have community media partners in every district municipality in the country.

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