



Africa made interesting
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Gillian Reynolds on a series that illuminated some of the rapid changes happening in Africa that remain widely unreported

. . . One series across the week actually did the trick, Africa's Fourth Estate, five 15-minute programmes presented by Tanzanian journalist Adam Lusekelo, produced by Ruth Evans. Each told a good story well; all showed Africa changing rapidly but such change going largely unremarked. When only the bad and bizarre are reported, said Lusekelo, we get used to Africa being portrayed as helpless, hopeless, the begging bowl of the world. It's not like that, he said, and went on to prove it.

We met media mogul Reginald Mengi on Monday, a businessman who owns 70 per cent of all Tanzanian media and is looking to expand across Africa. Is it dangerous for one man to have such control, asked Lusekelo; how much influence does he exert? Mengi, chuckling, said with business interests such as his (Coca-Cola and mining were two he mentioned), when would he have time to interfere? He's been called the Berlusconi of East Africa; will he enter politics? He'll concentrate, he replied, on what he does best: business.

On Tuesday, we met Caroline Mutoka, the Oprah Winfrey of Kenya. She presents the breakfast show on Kiss 100 FM. On air she is blunt, probing, irreverent. Her show makes the mighty quake. "We go after everyone in power," she said. "That's our job." She is also the station's sales and sponsorship manager, working 12-hour days, followed by study for an MBA at Nairobi University. (I wonder would Sarah Montague consider a job swap?)

On Wednesday there was the Rwandan show Urunana (it means "Hand in Hand"), modelled on The Archers, set up to offer health education and advice to a country ravaged by HIV-Aids. It's been on the air since 1999 and 73 per cent of the country listens, because it's realistic, entertaining and talks about things never spoken about in public before.

Thursday brought South African Soli Filander and his Cape Town reality TV programme Let's Fix It. People send him their problems (with jobs, housing, education, health) and he helps solve them. It isn't just a matter of calling in the corporates and big stores. He gets neighbours to help each other. He is passionate that South Africa should not be seen as a charity case, aware that the media are "the new colonising force across the world", and is intent on making people think what that means.

Friday's programme was about the internet and we met **Mahtar Ba**, president of [allAfrica.com](http://www.allAfrica.com), who is convinced that through the internet Africa can be informed about itself, the world informed about Africa and governments made accountable. Lusekelo asked how, in a country struggling to get electricity and clean water, an internet revolution could happen. It's happening, he was told. There are internet cafes even in villages in remote northern Nigeria.

Did I believe this? Not entirely, but it stopped my squawking and made me listen.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2005/05/31/bvgiil31.xml&sSheet=/arts/2005/05/31/ixartright.html>