

Citizen journalism shapes Kenya's politics

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Delegates attending the GK3 summit have been introduced to "mzalendo", a Kiswahili word meaning, "patriot". The word became a subject of heated debate as South African-based Kenyan lawyer Ms Ory Okolloh shared her experience in new media, citizen journalism, human rights and development.

Okolloh and two other bloggers are behind mzalendo.com, a blog which monitors the performance of Kenyan MPs and how they relate to the electorate. This has forced MPs from East Africa's largest economy to address the blogging community.

"We often complain about politicians letting us down. We are very good at this. But what can we do about it?" was the question the 30-year-old lawyer put to the audience attending her presentation entitled 'Emerging people session: Pushing the envelope.'

The site which is a first of its kind on the continent monitors what Kenyan representatives in the legislature are doing. It's a mammoth task for two people to keep track of every bill, every speech and every MP that passes through Kenya's august house.

"We want to develop a culture of questioning what your politician is doing for you," Okolloh says.

It is too early to say whether mzalendo.com will lead to political change in Africa. But the priority is to push government to be more open and transparent.

"This is our responsibility as individuals and citizens. We must ensure that information is passed on to the people who need it, to get knowledge and be able to make informed decisions that shape their lives."

Although sceptical whether Kenyans find mzalendo.com a useful tool, Okolloh said her main target audience is the youth under 30, who make up 70 percent of Kenya's population.