

Africa under one roof

Nigerians howl at it. Botswanans scream at their screens, while some African politicians and clergy want to put an end to this continent-wide sensation.

It is "Big Brother Africa", the latest incarnation of the reality television show that started in Europe. An estimated 30 million Africans are making it the most popular, and most controversial, show ever in Africa.

At the start of the show there were 12 people from 12 African countries and from different social classes.

The last to survive 106 days in captivity wins \$ 100,000.

Cameras catch their breakfast table belches, romantic liaisons and constant quarrels, and broadcast them to millions of homes and bars, and the contestants' interactions have become a test of Africans' views of themselves on a continent short of national television programming.

Parliament in Malawi recently banned the show from its public station because of what lawmakers described as its corruptive nature. President of Namibia ordered the government channel to broadcast educational programs, or anything other than a show he considers harmful to the morals of his countrymen.

Religious leaders have been vocal in denouncing "Big Brother Africa" as close to pornography.

But "Big Brother" defenders are many....

"The fact that different people from so different backgrounds can live together for so long should be a lesson," said A. Holi, the Kenyan housemate. "Our leaders can learn from us".

What "Big Brother" has done most of all is make clear that Africans are eager for more television by and about themselves.

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By Marc Lacey October, 22. 2003

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