



Chapter 9

Community radio: a view of the landscape after twenty years



Jayshree Pather

Jayshree Pather is a freelance researcher and campaigner for a range of organisations including the SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition; the Northern Cape Community Radio Forum and Wits Radio Academy. Her previous experience includes work as: a Communications Officer for Section27; and Projects Director for the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA). She is currently a coordinator of the Right2Know Campaign (R2K) in Gauteng and a member of its media freedom and diversity focus group. Her research and policy interests include community radio and digital migration, and she recently wrote a paper on Community Radio: Power Plays and Pressures for the 2014 State of the Newsroom published by Wits Journalism.

South Africa has witnessed substantial transformation of the broadcast sector over the past 20 years. In addition to the constitutional provisions of freedom of expression (section 16) and access to information (section 32); the liberalisation of the airwaves that began in the 1990s led (among other important measures) to a three-tier broadcast system (public, commercial and community); a shift from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster, and the establishment of an independent regulator.

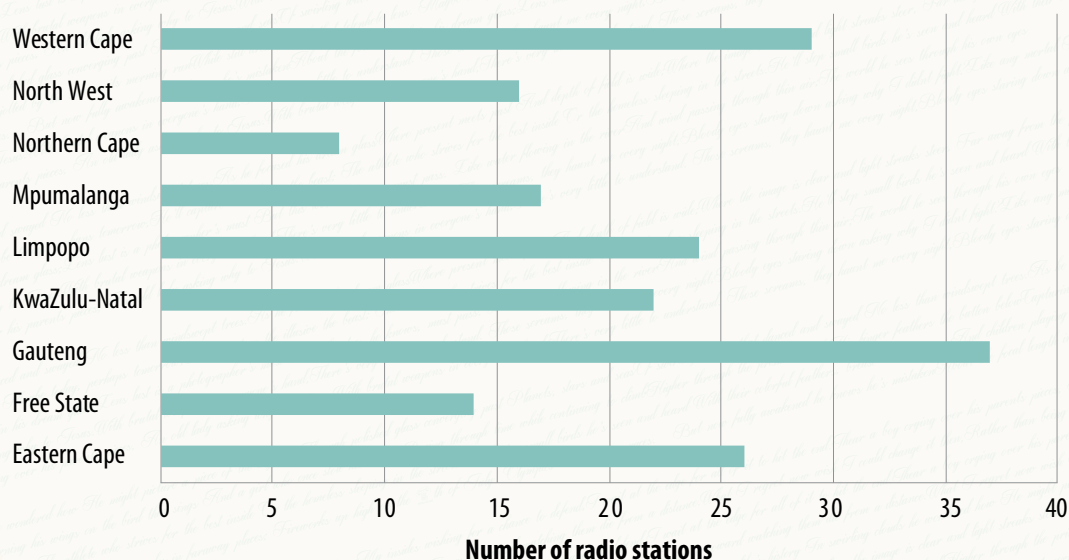
Changes are most visible when it comes to community broadcasting – as shown by the growth in the number of community radio stations that have been licensed and by increasing listenership. In 2001, a study commissioned by the Open Society Foundation of South Africa (OSF-SA), and undertaken by Nell and Shapiro, recorded that 65 community stations had been licensed and a conservative estimate was that ‘well over 1.6 million people in South Africa now listen to community stations’.¹⁰⁰ By 2005 there were 92 stations that had received four-year licences and three million people were listening to community stations according to SAARF figures.

Well over 1.6 million people in South Africa now listen to community stations.

A 2011 study commissioned by the Department of Communications (DoC) found ‘there were 165 nonprofit and low-power service licensees’ and of these 143 had been on air in the period between July and October 2011. Nineteen years later, almost every district municipality has community and small commercial media (CSCM) in the form of either community radio and/or newspapers and magazines.¹⁰¹ Recent SAARF figures¹⁰² (February 2013–February 2014) show that 8.3 million people listen to a community station and there are 204 stations broken by provinces as follows: Eastern Cape (27), Free State (15), Gauteng (39), Kwazulu-Natal (23), Limpopo (25), Mpumalanga (18), Northern Cape (10), North West (17), and Western Cape (30).

There are also eight community television stations licensed in four provinces: Gauteng (Soweto TV, Bara TV and Tshwane TV), North West (Platinum TV), KwaZulu-Natal (1KZN and Bay TV) and Western Cape (Cape TV), in addition to the grandfathered Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN).

Figure 1: Number of community radio stations by provinces



The opening of the airwaves has led to South Africa's rich cultural, religious and language diversity being reflected and has cut across a range of geographies from rural to urban to peri-urban. This is a remarkable achievement considering our past culture of repression, silencing and censorship.

The formalisation and institutionalisation of the third tier of broadcasting: to inform, educate and entertain; to add to diversity (of ownership and content); to ensure a more participatory form of media (at a level people can engage in more directly); and to promote development, social cohesion and a greater voice was therefore very critical.

... the core principle of community broadcasting which is broadcasting for the community by the community.

Given this purpose, the following reflection examines the community radio landscape in South Africa through the prism of some key dimensions – community ownership, control and participation, content and programming, and financial sustainability. It does so by drawing on academic research, workshops and media reports.

Before homing in on these dimensions, some general observations:

Firstly, given the size of the sector, the wide range and spread of geographies and socioeconomic contexts in which stations operate, it is very hard to generalise. There are considerable variations in levels of governance, management, programming quality, sustainability and impact. Some of the different models of community stations are also as a result of a station being started for different reasons: 'some founders wanted to pursue certain interests – religious and political in some cases, like some of the conservative Afrikaans stations; stations founded by community "activists" who wanted to create a platform for community expression;

and entertainment-based stations founded by young people with a DJ mentality (or [who] want to emulate a commercial station)'.¹⁰³

In a policy submission made to the DoC in 2009, the NCRF called for a move away from the one-size-fits-all approach to community radio¹⁰² as 'too prescriptive; [it] does not take into account the vast diversity that exists within many communities nor does it allow for communities themselves to define what its core issues are (in contravention of the core principle of community broadcasting which is broadcasting for the community by the community)'. The NCRF argued instead that each community should define what the objectives of its community station are as guided by the regulator, Icasa.

As Kruger et al (2013) put it 'Real radio stations resist easy cataloging and take a wide range of forms... There is little benefit in searching for an abstract purity in the sector, which would exclude stations on the basis that they fail to measure up to one standard or the other. It is far more productive, and makes a better contribution to real diversity of voices, to be inclusive, allowing for inventiveness and initiative in responding to different circumstances'.¹⁰⁵ While there has been a notable increase in a research focus on community radio, as demonstrated by a growing number of research papers on the sector, the lack of quantitative information related to the sector is a gap, as is the lack of impact studies on community radio.

In 2011, the DoC commissioned a study looking at the impact of its Community Radio Support Programme, some of the findings of which are reflected in this report. Undertaken by Pygma Consulting, the study involved a desktop review of the legislative, regulatory and policy framework for community radio, market research and a questionnaire that was sent to all community radio stations.

In 2013, the MDDA invited bids¹⁰⁶ for research into the impact of MDDA funding on both community and small commercial media as the agency had supported 413 projects to the value of R201 million and wanted to evaluate

its support to improve its positive effect in the future. It is hoped that this research is prioritised as it will provide useful and important insights that should feed into upcoming policy review processes.

A brief history

According to the Windhoek Charter on Broadcasting in Africa (a statement of press freedom principles adopted by African newspaper journalists at a UNESCO seminar in Windhoek, Namibia in 1991), 'Community broadcasting is broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is nonprofit.' The South African community radio sector can trace its roots to the CASET project (Bush Radio's predecessor) and Radio Zibonele. The CASET project provided audio political education by producing cassette tapes containing political speeches from banned political activists, local music and radical poetry, and disseminated these to activists and grassroots formations in the Cape Peninsula.¹⁰⁷ Radio Zibonele evolved out of the Zibonele Community Health Workers' Project, a health awareness project in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, that produced health programmes in the 1990s using a participatory approach and with content produced with members of listeners' committees.

The 'Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves' Conference in the Netherlands in 1991 made a series of recommendations for broadcast reform that would become founding principles for post-apartheid broadcast policy and laid the foundation for some of the legal and institutional frameworks. These include a definition of community broadcasting based on the principles of community ownership and control, and were run on a nonprofit basis.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), and later to merge with SATRA to become Icasa) was established in 1993; the IBA Act was promulgated in 1994; and the first community broadcast licences were issued in 1995 to Radio

Maritzburg, Bush Radio, Radio Mafisa, Soweto Community Radio, Radio Bushbuckridge, and Radio Zibonele. The period that followed saw significant support channeled to community stations, initially by international donors such as OSF-SA (which provided infrastructure and training to enable the first stations to set up) and later by government. Stations targeting specific groups (such as religious stations) have also received support from their respective communities and the institutions or organisations to which they are linked.

Community broadcasting is broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is nonprofit.

The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was set up in 2004 with the specific mandate to provide support for community media in order to encourage the growth and development of small commercial and community media for greater diversity. The Department of Communications has also played a significant role through its Community Radio Support Programme (CRSP) – an infrastructure roll-out to provide technical equipment to stations; signal distribution and upgrade; programme production support; training and capacity-building; and satellite network infrastructure support.

Government Communication and Information Services (GCIS) has been instrumental in channelling government advertising to community stations as well as providing access to important government information. In 2013, the then minister in the Presidency, Collins Chabane, reported that in the previous

financial year alone, GCIS had supported the financial viability of community and small commercial media by placing R37 million worth of advertising on community media platforms (print, radio and television).¹⁰⁸ The National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), a national, membership-driven association, was formed in 1993 to build an enabling environment and coherent sector identity for community radio. The NCRF website reports current membership as 120 stations. Over the past couple of years the NCRF has been weak—partly due to financial challenges and internal power struggles¹⁰⁹ and as a result of 'its helicopter (that is, top heavy)' approach¹¹⁰ but is now in the process of organisational renewal and re-building as reported by the deputy chair of the NCRF at the Joburg Radio Conference held in July 2014.

The development in community radio in South Africa has been described as a 'project to create and build community broadcasters ... as an entirely new arena for public discussion, geared specifically for poor and marginalised groups', and 'has to be seen as a deliberate and programmatic attempt to create local public spheres and to balance what was seen as a mainstream media not sufficiently attuned to the new order and its values. The phrase 'voice of the voiceless' is often used to capture this purpose.'¹¹¹

A picture of the landscape

This section draws on different reports to examine some of the successes, challenges and problems that have emerged over the past 19 years and tries to give a snapshot of the landscape. It is by no means exhaustive.

We have just been on a two month journey through a fascinating terrain – the community radio sector in South Africa. We have spoken to 18-year olds who dream of the power of the microphone to a 70-year old woman who wants to share her stories with the community

over the airwaves before she dies. We have seen young activists stop to listen to the old people of their communities ... We have listened to moving programmes that seemed to our inexperienced ears as professional, and far more meaningful, than anything we hear on commercial radio. We have travelled to every province in South Africa, to urban, rural and peri-urban areas. We have listened to people, both station-based and service providers, speak with passion of this extraordinary medium, and they have done us the honour of sharing with us their love affair with community radio.¹¹²



Some of the challenges that Nell and Shapiro identified in their 2001 evaluation of community radio training programmes were: a lack of understanding of what community radio is; a lack of organisational development and management skills; a lack of communication skills; a lack of radio and broadcasting skills (technical, programming and presentation); and, a lack of resources (financial and human). These challenges are still prevalent today. In 2009, at a workshop held in Johannesburg, members of the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) identified the following challenges facing community broadcasters: a limited understanding of community radio by government, officials and researchers (participants felt that the decision to support community radio was often modeled on corporate or public broadcasting and ignored

the mandate of community radio); community stations that mimic mainstream broadcasters; community stations as a 'breeding ground for big media houses' and the dangers of an over-reliance on government and corporate funding.

Participants were also frank about the power struggles that emerged from hidden or vested interests in setting up community stations, and the tensions that existed between management and boards at many stations. Delegates were also uncertain about freedom of expression and were concerned about repressive elements of new policy; particularly given their dependence on state funding: 'We do not know how the state will respond to criticism and pressure, nor what this will mean for a sector that is largely dependent on state funding.'¹¹³

Community ownership, control and participation

'It is your radio station; you must be involved in its running, and you must be able to tell your community station what kind of programming you would like it to broadcast; and to make it truly a community station you ought to be able to communicate with it' (Community activist, Right2Know Media Diversity workshop, July 2011).

How to give meaning and effect to community ownership has arguably been one of the most vexing dilemmas facing community broadcasters. This has partly to do with the notion of community which, as Kruger points out, is vague and 'tends to idealise the underprivileged groups to which it is most often applied and glosses over internal complexities'.¹¹⁴

Van Zyl (2003) highlights the valuable role a community radio station can play in creating a sense of community: 'Interest groups within a said geographical setting can come together to apply for a licence and once the licence is granted then a community is created around the station's interactivities; so where no community existed before, the radio through discussion and debate can construct one.'

However, communities are not all homogeneous – not even communities of interest – as there is a range of class, language, cultural, religious, political views and interests. Understanding communities as sites of struggle over access to resources, influence, status and voice is crucial because, as Burkett highlights: 'A community is a paradoxical experience. It is about difference as much as unity. It is about conflict and harmony, selfishness and mutuality, separateness and wholeness, discomfort and contentment. Privileging one of those opposites in interpreting communities denies the transforming powers of human communion and resorts to fixed ideas about communities.'¹¹⁵

The reality is that many community radio stations are located in areas where they are one of the few places for employment and training, especially for the youth, and the station as a source of money, power and influence becomes a site of struggle for control and access to these.

Poor communities faced with high unemployment and lack of access to infrastructure view the sector as providers of income and resources such as gaining access to telephones, fax machines, photocopiers, the Internet, training opportunities and above all, paid work rather than as initiatives needing community support. For example, the early experiences of community radio projects in South Africa, where volunteers rebelled, staged sit-ins and strikes, stole equipment and CDs, or simply abandoned stations when they realised there was insufficient income to pay salaries, are testimony to this. (Siemering & Fairbairn, 2007)

The Pygma Consulting study found that 'Governance problems have beset many stations Forty-eight per cent (48 per cent) of those interviewed cited this as a key problem. This was reinforced by interviews with stakeholders (including Icasa).

These stem predominantly from a lack of understanding of the roles of boards and management and challenges faced by many stations in facilitating substantive participation by communities.'¹¹⁶

Examples where there have been struggles around the radio station include Thetha FM in Orange Farm, Gauteng, which was the epicentre of conflict¹¹⁷ when one of its presenters accused a local pastor of being a satanist, which led to a situation where staff were held hostage.¹¹⁸ The situation at Thetha FM station has also been exacerbated by allegations of fraud, mismanagement and nepotism and has been ongoing since 2006.¹¹⁹ In May 2014, staff at Radio Zibonele in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape went on strike because of concerns about the station manager and allegations of mismanagement and nepotism.¹²⁰

Village FM, a newly licensed station in North West Province is among the stations where there is infighting and two competing boards, and Icasa has launched an investigation for non-compliance with licence conditions; Unitra in the Eastern Cape was embroiled in similar conflicts in 2010.¹²¹

Some community stations have adopted a sectoral approach to representation on the board whereby any community structure can participate (church groups, NGOs, youth organisations, sports associations) with the exception of political parties in accordance with Icasa's regulations. Others, like Radio Zibonele, Thetha FM and Karabo FM have adopted a membership approach to AGMs – while the AGM is open to all, only members are allowed to nominate and vote for board members. The danger of this model is it that could privilege those in the community with money and marginalise working class or unemployed people.

Listeners' clubs or associations have become popular mechanisms for enhancing community participation in content and programming, and particularly for engaging with perceptions and levels of awareness among listeners. The demographics of listeners' clubs vary but if stations have a deliberate strategy of encouraging diversity (age, educational levels, socioeconomic levels) this could be an effective way of engaging the community broadly.

The challenges of 'community', given South Africa's diverse language, cultural and religious

interests coupled with the challenges of dealing with our deeply divided past and huge levels of socioeconomic inequalities, are immense and some of the tensions that have emerged over the years may indicate that this was underestimated. 'While the idea of media for the community, by the community was to achieve popular currency in both popular and legal definitions of the sector... within this broad definition lay much that was, and remains, contested... Policy interventions grappled with the issue of community participation and ownership since the early days of community radio, and to date the issue is unresolved.'¹²²

**It is your radio station;
you must be involved
in its running, and
you must be able to
tell your community
station what kind of
programming you
would like...**

In future, policy makers and practitioners will once again need to need to wrestle with the difficulties of building communities, and this time with greater recognition of community stations as sites of resources, power and status – and therefore contested.

Content and programming

A community station needs to 'offer programming that answers the needs of its community, often through the familiar trio of education, information and entertainment.'¹²³ To this, Fairbairn adds 'validating and strengthening communities, covering topics that are relevant; encouraging discussion and debate; providing platforms for marginalised voices and others' as important dimensions.¹²⁴

A study conducted by Jansen in 2009, found that:

The pre-occupation with generating com-

mercial revenue, and dependence on advertising from either commercial or state sources, was not only impacting on the orientation and style of programming, but also de-prioritising drawing in the actual community into programme content and direct participation and that a lack of development, deepening and widening poverty in townships and the departure and decline of the radical intelligentsia has caused community radio stations in South Africa to be a sterile imitation of what they ought to be – distinguished only by their size, scope, locality and formal adherence to broadcast licensing requirements.¹²⁵

A 2009 study by the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership (SPI) highlighted the risks of sponsored programmes and paid-for slots:

Listeners are concerned that local government departments mask some of the serious issues that need discussing, such as service delivery. Inexperienced presenters and journalists sometimes self-censor by not discussing critical issues, which they feel, could offend the government officials. This can be attributed to a number of reasons, such as lack of journalistic experience, and fear of interrogating the department that buys the most programme slots. On the other hand, the business relationship allows the stations to leverage government support.¹²⁶

...not a single international story showed up in our sample. While community stations should focus primarily on local news, ignoring the rest of the world entirely seems surprising.

News is another important component of a station's role to inform:

If community stations are to play a role in building local public spheres, the way in which they handle their news output must be

relevant to how effectively they are able to shape a local agenda and local discussion. If they simply reflect a national news agenda by following the priorities of major national media, their contribution is limited.¹²⁷

In a study undertaken with a small sample of 13 community radio stations, the following insights emerge: most news on community stations was lifted from newspapers and websites; only half of the stations studied had a news department of any kind; and there was very little international news on geographic community stations:

...not a single international story showed up in our sample. While community stations should focus primarily on local news, ignoring the rest of the world entirely seems surprising.¹²⁸

Some of the challenges with collecting news included lack of staff, facilities and resources – the vital organisational features that influence the production of news and which are a key factor hampering a stations' ability to fulfil its mandate. 'Station-owned transport is rare, and money has to be scraped together to pay for public transport. Thetha FM news editor Simon Nwanba said he sometimes used his own money to pay reporters' taxi fare.¹²⁹ Language translation requirements place additional demands on staff time and affect staffing patterns.

'The most important observation from this research is that the news function at many community stations has atrophied to a simple matter of finding items on news websites, editing them somewhat and reading them on air. Too often, actual reporting does not form part of the picture.' (Kruger, 2011)

Sustainability and independence

The reality is that many community radio stations are located in areas where they are one of the few places for employment and training. A substantial entrepreneurial spirit exists in community radio, and in practice community radio stations employ a range of financial

sustainability mechanisms (again, much of this is not well documented).

Radio Ikwezi, a religious (and therefore a 'community of interest' station) in KwaZulu-Natal partnered with a church mission which resulted in the station being able to negotiate a lease for a nominal fee from the mission. Radio Ikwezi also pools its Internet costs with two organisations (a school and a local business) in the area. The bulk of its revenue comes from advertising, but it does not sell generic spots – instead it sells programme sponsorship and sells mostly to the big seed companies in the area, where agriculture is the main industry.

An Outside Broadcast Unit has been central to Radio Riverside's sustainability and the station is able to generate an income stream from making syndicated programmes for other community stations in the province. Radio Riverside also gives local businesses and 'spazas' a lower advertising rate. Radio Islam gets about 95 per cent of its income from advertising and there are some months when it does not have enough advertising space to cope with the demand.

Radio Phalaborwa credits local businesses with supporting it to purchase studio equipment and a transmitter, and relies on advertising agencies such as Serongwane, Motswako Media, Media Connection and the NCRF and the GCIS for its revenue, as most local businesses do not see the value of advertising. Only about 0.1 per cent of local businesses advertise on the station.

Community radio has also served an important training and capacity-building role, with many people leaving to join public and commercial broadcasters and media enterprises. Here again, there is insufficient data and more needs to be done to track this movement of people from community to commercial media and to quantify this important contribution to building skills.

Brenda Leonard from Bush Radio (interview, 2012) saw advertising as the big obstacle to sustainability and believes that 'the whole industry needs to be changed'.¹³⁰ She cited a recent experience where the station had to wait

for a long time for the media buyer to finalise the arrangements despite the client's having made the decision to advertise with the station quite quickly. Some agencies are slow in making payments to stations and this has a huge effect on plans and cash flow.

In early 2012, the MDDA and GCIS announced the development of an online booking system for community and small media that would ensure that GCIS adspend would reach these sectors. This came on the back of oversight visits to community media initiatives in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Western Cape and Northern Cape by the Portfolio Committee on Communications (PCC), where one of the main complaints raised was the difficulty community radio experienced in terms of raising advertising revenue.

Community radio has also served an important training and capacity-building role, with many people leaving to join public and commercial broadcasters and media enterprises.

While the proposed centralised advertising system mooted by the MDDA and GCIS is a good idea which will allow for the monitoring of advertising revenue flowing to community radio, a challenge is compliance. Stations will need to be in good standing with South African Revenue Service and Icasa, and for many this is currently a big problem.

Some community radio stations are doing very well financially – but more research needs to be undertaken to understand how resources flow into community radio and how they are being used, how they are ploughed back into the station and the community – and especially to assess what impact this has had on content.

Ntshangase (2009) raises this challenge in relation to Jozi FM: 'Its huge potential audience, with increasing levels of wealth, has allowed the station to build an audience that stood at over 500 000 at its peak, although recent figures show that it has dropped back to 289 000 (Rams October 2012). Although it is structured as a nonprofit entity and is governed by a board elected by the community, it has adopted a resolutely commercial approach.

It is able to generate some R5 million, which amounts to 70 per cent of total income (2007 figures). However, it has been criticised for losing touch with its mission of community service, and has had to face demonstrations by disgruntled members'.¹³¹ Recent SAARF Rams figures (February 2013) put Jozi FM listenership at 394 000.¹³²

At a NCRF/AIDC workshop held in Johannesburg in 2009, Mashilo Boloka from the Department of Communications proposed that struggling community radio stations become fully funded so that they are not concerned with generating resources and able to focus their time and attention on the other critical challenges they are facing. In an interview with Wits Justice Project, Alex FM saw the consistent covering of baseline costs as important for sustainability. 'We receive money for advertising from the government communications department. If we could move to a more sustainable funding model, with a consistent covering of our baseline costs by some means that would be great, as funding is a real challenge.'

Proponents of the funded model view argue that an annual subsidy to a community station that qualifies and which can demonstrate compliance and commitment to the values and principles of community broadcasting –will help to reduce the current bureaucratic and onerous application systems and ensure greater stability and predictability of funds for stations. This is an issue the Right2Know Campaign (R2K) is exploring and in 2014 its national summit resolved to campaign for an annual grant to community radio.¹³³



The point about South Africa's race and class complexities and its impact on the financial sustainability of stations has also been a recurrent theme. Tleane has observed:

Like many other aspects, or facets, of the community radio sector its financial state, and ability to remain sustainable is very much shaped by the race and class complexities that make up the country. The sector is therefore a mirror image of the broader society... stations that serve richer sections of the society are much better-off when compared to those that serve working class communities.¹³⁴

Zane Ibrahim, widely recognised as a pioneer of Bush Radio, writing in the *Rhodes Journalism Review* in September 2004,¹³⁵ also highlighted the influence of racial and class dynamics on the community radio sector:

Those radio stations classified as geographical are more likely to have to struggle for survival than those servicing an interest group. The broadcasting system, at all levels, relies on good commercial revenue, which broadcasters can only achieve through the wealthier listeners. It is also interesting to note that the geographically-based stations are managed by people of an average age of 27, while the average age of the management of the special interest, and mostly faith-based station, is 40 years ... over 90 per cent of the stations owned by special interest groups have membership in the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), while all the geographically-based stations are members of the NCRF. Sadly, this divide essentially represents a racial divide as well, with some elements of class division.

Findings from the Pygma Consulting study include :¹³⁶

- Just over half (52.6 per cent) of the stations surveyed in the market research reported that they had been off air for a period during the licence terms. Reasons included power failures/problems, debts to Sentech for signal distribution, governance problems or staff issues’.
- Over half (52.6 per cent) of the stations surveyed relied on volunteers for programming. Others stated that they used part-time staff rather than volunteers so that there are some contractual obligations in place.
- Fifty-five per cent of stations surveyed indicated that they had staff/volunteer crises over the past three years. There also seems to be a lack of policies (human resources, volunteers, finance, editorial, programming) to assist in determining roles and responsibilities in stations. Even where stations stated that they do have such policies, very few indicated that these had been implemented and assisted in resolving challenges.
- More than half (54.3 per cent) of the stations surveyed produce annual audited financial statements. Those that didn’t regularly audit their financial statements indicated that the costs are often prohibitive and/or that they did not have easy access to qualified auditors. Stations in rural areas for example said they had to take their books to auditors in larger towns for auditing. The most significant common monthly costs include signal distribution (for those using Sentech), staff salaries (including volunteer stipends where relevant), communication costs (telephone, internet, fax and Telkom studio to transmitter links), rent, technical maintenance (including costs associated with leasing photocopies, faxes etc.) and SAMRO fees.¹³⁷

A central debate around community radio in South Africa has been the tug-of-war between political and commercial pressures and the impact that this could have on the independence of community stations. ‘The common fixation with generating income can often threaten



a station’s independence, since money often comes with strings attached. It is easy to be tempted by a large contract, but it is essential to make sure that it does not jeopardise the station’s relationship with the community.’¹³⁸

A 2005 study by Console Tleane of the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) ‘The state, size and shape of the community radio sector in South Africa’ found

Overall, there has not been any quantifiable state interference. There are only isolated incidents where one or two stations reported political pressures from the ruling party ... The critical test though is the extent to which stations are indeed owned and controlled by communities.¹³⁹

Since then, there have been instances where government entities have used their position in an attempt to influence content. South African municipalities in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape and in Hartswater, Northern Cape, have mounted advertising boycotts of community media over critical reportage (Parliamentary communications committee, 2011)’ and Icasa noted that some stations ‘have been presented with challenges from local government representatives who seek to have undue influence on the administration of the stations. If not regulated and managed properly by community broadcasters, local government funding might exacerbate such a trend.’¹⁴⁰

The chilling attack on Karabo FM is the starkest example of pressure exerted on a station with the burning down of the station in 2013.

On Saturday 7 September 2013, two guys came in wearing balaclavas and with guns. There were two guests in the studio with the presenter. The armed men took the guests

to the back door, tied up the security guard and came back to the studio. They asked the presenter to please switch off the mikes and told him we are here to do our jobs, we are not here to hurt you. They then poured petrol and set the station alight.¹⁴¹

In this case, in court papers it was alleged that two politically connected individuals – the mayor and deputy chair of the ANC Free State – were involved. Pule Nkomo, who has been charged with arson alleged that he was paid by the executive mayor of the Metsimaholo Local Municipality and the Deputy Chair of the ANC in the Free State to burn down the radio station. The investigation is still ongoing.

Ref: Free State Times 11 Nov 2013 Mayor implicated in radio fire / Power FM Brutus Mahlaku implicated in the torching of Karabo FM. (www.powerfm.co.za).

Community unhappiness with the municipality for service delivery failures, allegations that the mayor was implicated in fraud and mismanagement and the changing political landscape – particularly as a result of the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in the area – are thought to be some of the ingredients that led to the attack on Karabo FM.

While community stations have experienced tension and conflict, particularly around resources and positions of influence as has been described earlier, nothing as violent as this has occurred before and shows how vulnerable stations are.

The SPL study raises another dimension of commercial advertising.

Commercial advertising can contradict the norms and values of community radio. In one of the stations visited, listeners complained about the inability of the station to hold local business accountable to the community because the station was receiving funds from the said businesses and local government departments – to the extent that one listener labelled a station 'ANC aligned'.

Gender

Women's participation in community radio in South Africa is a subject of debate among relatively few people. It seems that men have very quickly and easily colonised the sector. Glass ceilings have been installed faster than a studio can send a signal to transmitter link... National gatherings of the community radio sector are comparable to bachelors' parties. For women, employment selection processes can seem like temporary dating agencies.¹⁴²

It seems that men have very quickly and easily colonised the sector.

Gender is another important area that warrants further documentation and research and women's participation cannot be measured only in terms of numbers but also by representation in the production, ownership and decision-making bodies of the station.

In 1996, Naughton observed that 'the general trend was that women are around at the development phase of a project, but after gestation, the operations become more male in representation, organisational structure and dynamic'.



A 2008 study into the participation of women at Al-Ansaar, a Muslim station based in Durban, found that while the station's policy documents state that the role of women would be 'paramount' in its policies, projects and programmes, in practice, 'deference to religious leaders and their dogmatic stance on the role of women' has made the station management very circumspect about whom they give a voice. This in turn has influenced the form and level of community participation and, overall, 'although women are involved in the operations management, programming and in a technical capacity, they are not adequately represented in the ownership and decision-making bodies at Radio Al-Ansaar.'¹⁴³

It would be important to assess, for example, what has happened with Moutse community radio that was started by a community (in this case, the Rural Women's Movement) to see whether the station was 'able to retain its female power and be a shining example of the sisters doing it differently. Particularly ... [as] this would be a reflection of the demographics of the community.'¹⁴⁴

While there have been a number of studies looking at gender and the media – notably the 2008 Gender Links 'Glass Ceilings' study – and the MDDA hosted a gender and media roundtable in 2009, this is another area that requires more focused attention.

Prospects for community radio

South Africa is on the brink of a significant overhaul of the broadcasting policy architecture. The community broadcast sector is amongst the most under-researched development sector in South Africa, and the review comes at a very opportune moment. This review will provide the community broadcast sector the opportunity to grapple with a number of key challenges – in terms of the structure, governance and management of stations as well as issues related to policy and the enabling environment. If a new policy framework is going to be created, it

must build on the lessons learned over the past 20 years of community broadcasting and not on a superficial understanding of the challenges, obstacles and opportunities.

What emerges from this brief reflection is a vibrant, robust sector that has years of experience, has grown significantly and makes a critical contribution to our democracy and the diversification of our media, particularly in terms of language. In future, policy frameworks need to build on lessons from the past nineteen years, have a less rosy-eyed view of community stations and recognise that much has changed on the political and economic front.

References

- Fairbairn, F and Siemering, B (2007) Guidebook on sustainability. Developing Radio Partners
- Hadland, A and K Thorne (2004): *The People's Voice: The Development and Current State of the South African Community Media Sector*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Jansen, M (2009): The impact of neo-liberalism on the development of community radio in democratic South Africa, Malmö University.
- Kruger, F (2011): News broadcasting on South African community radio: in search of new spheres. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 32: 3, 61-79.
- Kruger, F, Monji R and Smurthwaite M (2013): The Healthy Community Radio Station: Wits Radio Academy, OSISA.
- Mall, A (2008): Busting down the doors: The role of sisters in Muslim community radio in South Africa. *Agenda* 77, 32-46
- Mavhungu, J (2009): Formative Target Audience Research: A case study of five community radio stations in South Africa. Grahamstown: Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership.
- National Community Radio Forum and Alternative Information Development Centre (2009) Community Media Reflection Conference, Johannesburg available at <http://ncrf.org.za/programs-downloads/downloads/ncrf-aidc-community-media-reflection-report.pdf/view>

Naughton, T (1999): Community Radio: A voice for the voiceless, Agenda 31: 12-18.

Nell, M and J Shapiro (2001): *Community Radio Training Evaluation: First Footprints of the African Renaissance , 1997-2001*. Cape Town: British Council and Open Society Foundation.

Pygma Consulting (2011): Impact of the Department of Communications' Community Radio Support Programme available at <http://www.doc.gov.za/media-room/reports.html>

Tleane, C (2005): The state, size and shape of the community radio sector in South Africa, Freedom of Expression Institute.

Van Zyl, J (2003): Community Radio – The People's Voice, Sharp Sharp Press

Wits Justice Project (2013): Documenting the early days of the Wits Justice Show – Utilising community radio to disseminate information about accessing justice in Gauteng accessible at <https://witsjustice-project.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/documenting-the-early-days-of-the-wits-justice-show.pdf>