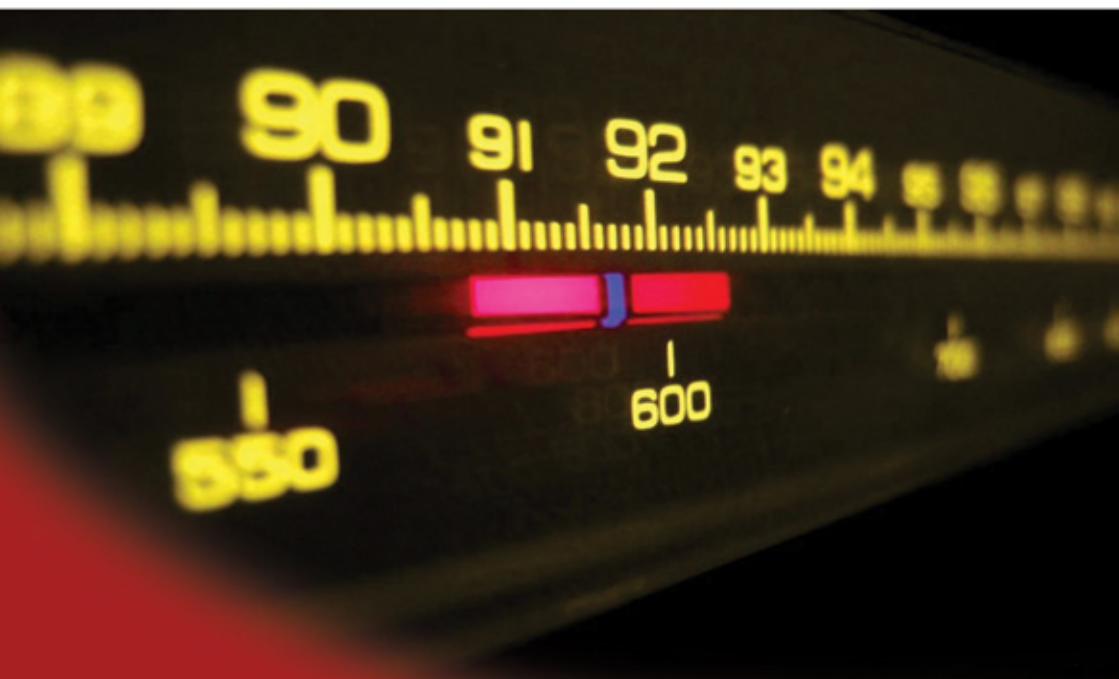


**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION INSTITUTE**

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An exploration into the operations and  
sustainability of Community radio stations  
in South Africa

*T. Gondwe    Z.N. Mavindidze*

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## FOREWORD

The research component of this study is part of an on-going programme funded by the RAITH Foundation, “Advancing the right to freedom of expression for all by 2015”. This publication draws conclusion to a set of engagements with community radio stations in South Africa. These are the first in a series of engagements that seek to explore the operating environment within which community media exist. While this first investigation is confined to an exploratory methodology focusing on community radio, subsequent research will engage in more detailed analysis of the core issues, extending the sample to include not only radio but community television and print as well.

The Freedom of Expression Institute expresses its thanks and sincere gratitude to the management and staff of all the community radio stations that participated in this study. The input they gave has contributed greatly towards developing an understanding of the scope and complexity of issues faced by different community media organizations and will aid in the aggregation of a composite agenda and plan of action and support for community media organizations in South Africa. We hope to maintain the productive relationship we have established with these stations. Together, we believe that a society where everyone enjoys the right to freedom of expression can be realized.

### **Phenyo Butale**

*Executive Director (Freedom of Expression Institute)*

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## COMMUNITY MEDIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Establishment and development

South African media is comprised of public, commercial/private media and community media. These three tiers use both traditional platforms such as print, television, radio and newer digital platforms in serving the core functions of entertaining, educating and informing the public. The value of a free and vibrant media sector cannot be over emphasized as a critical component to any modern democracy. The South African constitution reinforces this in its protection of the right to freedom of expression; however, while this role is recognized, most of the attention has in the past 20 years been dedicated to growing a diverse and independent private media sector. This process was given priority as a means towards opening up the public spaces for critical engagement of previously marginalized black population under apartheid. Now, 20 years in to democracy, the expanding influence of commercial interest in the private media has seemingly taken over the ideals of a free and independent media and replaced these with the pursuit of sustaining growth of sales and revenue. As a result, commercial media has grown increasingly distant from being an instrument for civil and political engagement towards those shaped by the pursuit of profits in the interests of the few elite. Despite efforts to develop and diversify the media landscape, what has emerged is a reincarnation of a media environment that is still predominantly owned and controlled by a few players, which the aspirations of a truly representative media still far from reality. This has prompted the renewed attention towards community media as an alternative that can bridge the gaps that have been widened by concentration of private media.

There have been attempts in South Africa to get community media back on the media transformation and development agenda<sup>1</sup>. This has been the case, not only in South Africa but in many other developing countries including those in East and Southern Africa. Wanyeki (2000) notes that with the emergence from colonialism and the establishment of more democratic forms of government in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia; the community media regained prominence and evolved to reflect the ideals of pluralistic society. The renewed attempts to raise awareness of

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<sup>1</sup> The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was set up by an Act of Parliament (Act 14 of 2002) to enable "historically disadvantaged communities and persons not adequately served by the media" to gain access to the media. The primary beneficiaries were established as community media and small commercial media in South Africa.

the fundamental issues in community media are a confirmation of the important role that the segment has traditionally served; as the voice of communities that are more often side-lined in debates of social and economic development. Despite this neglect, the community media segment continues to serve this important role in South Africa.

Over the years, community media has allowed for a platform on which a diverse range of information and perspectives can be shared with most of those who had been excluded in private media audiences. This vital role has helped in shaping opinions of the public and informing communities of the broader context of events and important decisions leading out of minority to majority rule. However, with the emergence of newer technologies and the reduction of income gaps in most societies, the role of community media has evolved to not only serve as a means of informing, but increasingly as a vital tool for engagement. The principles promoted by community media have expanded to include the needs of communities in a more interactive way through participation at this level. This has contributed towards building democratic institutions and a system of governance that equally reflects the values and aspirations of all in society.

### **Types of community media**

As highlighted in the previous section, the media in South Africa uses a variety of platforms to convey its message. Community media is primarily concentrated in the provision of radio, print and television services. Communities are also increasingly making use of digital media platforms such as various social media services, for example; community related Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. However, these platforms are not geographically bound and thus the description of community media in this section will be limited to those that are by definition delimited to specific communities.

### ***Community radio***

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has over the past 18 years licensed more than 200 community radio and five community television channels. The National Community Radio Forum is the largest representative organization in this segment with over 120 community radio stations in its membership. Col-



lectively, community radio stations reach an estimated audience of 8.9 million people mostly in rural areas of South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

### **Community television**

ICASA has also licensed six community television channels; Soweto TV (Johannesburg), Cape Town TV (Cape Town), Bay TV (Port Elizabeth), One KZN (Richards Bay), Tshwane TV (Pretoria), North West TV and Bara TV (Soweto). The Association of Community Television South Africa (Act-SA) was established in 2013 to advance the interests of the South African community television sector and its roles includes advocacy and lobbying, programme syndication, content exchange, maximising commercial opportunities, training and capacity building.<sup>3</sup> Community television reaches an estimated collective audience of six million viewers in South Africa.

### **Community print**

Community print media is comprised of mostly small newspapers, newsletters and magazines, all of which are owned by local communities. The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) is the largest representative of community print media in South Africa and currently has approximately 230 members nationally.<sup>4</sup> According to the AIP community print is very diverse in terms of ownership, content and target audience with many of the publications being one-person, home-based operations that rely solely on advertising for revenue. However, other community print media are more established with a cover price on a range of titles distributed in different communities.

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<sup>2</sup> SAARF Station Audience- Average Daily Listernship (February, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> Motse Mfuleni (Bay TV) Act-SA Chairman (Launch of Act-SA, June 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Source: Association of Independent Publishers, Website (About AIP) <http://www.aip.org.za/about/>

## FOCUS ON COMMUNITY RADIO

The brief introduction to various community media operating in South Africa shows the dominance of community radio over other platforms in the segment solely based on audience size. In 2004, community radio audiences were estimated at 5 million average daily listeners.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the highlighted 8.9 million average daily listeners in 2014 are significant in that this figure represents the fastest growing audience base compared to television, which has also recorded growth in audience and community print media which has recorded steady decline in readership over the last few years.<sup>6</sup> The decline in community print media readership is in line with the trends across all print media, recording steady decline in readership which has been attributed to attrition of the traditional audience towards television and digital media.

### Community radio and access to information

Several reasons have been advanced in explaining the resurgence of community radio with most emphasizing the role that this segment plays in promoting active citizenship and public participation. This has also been the major justification for support of the sector through government and civil society efforts at policy level. This support for community radio is part of an effort to get rural and marginalised communities to dialogue among themselves on critical issues that affect their daily lives, as well as connecting them to discourses at the national level. As such, these stations are conceived as critical vehicles for advancing community development, participation and access to information, particularly among communities that are excluded from the mainstream media.

Some of the recent institutions, policy and statutes initiated in the sector include;

#### *The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)*

ICASA is the regulator for the South African communications, broadcasting and postal services sector. The body was established by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act of 2000 (Amended). With regards to community radio, the mandate of ICASA is defined within the Electronic Communications Act and this

<sup>5</sup> SAARF RAMS, 2004B

<sup>6</sup> FXI SAARF AMPS, Readership trend analysis: 2008-2013.

established the regulations for licensing and regulation of electronic communications and broadcasting services. In addition to this role, ICASA has the mandate to monitor compliance with license terms and conditions, develop regulations on the planning and management of radio frequency spectrum.

### ***Media Development and Diversity Agency***

The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was set up by an Act of Parliament (Act 14 of 2002) to enable “historically disadvantaged communities and persons not adequately served by the media” to gain access to the media. The conception of this body was envisioned to support and capacitate community media and small commercial media in line with the aspiration of broadening access to information at the community level. In 2013, the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) announced the review of the MDDA Act to allow for further enhancement of the Act with developments and challenges in the segment. In line with this process of review, the Minister in the Presidency who is also responsible for GCIS noted that “the overall objectives of the MDDA strategic focus for the period 2013-2017 (will be) informed by its vision ‘Access to diversified media for all’ and mandate “Ensuring the sustainable development of a vibrant, innovative and people centred media.”<sup>7</sup> The support offered by the MDDA will be highlighted in subsequent sections of this paper, focusing on the practice of policy and implications thereof for community radio stations.

### ***National Integrated ICT policy***

In 2013 the Department of Communication initiated the National Integrated ICT policy review within the relevant sectors including; broadcasting, telecommunications, postal services, e-commerce and e-government. The review process is has been initiated not only to streamline policy in the various sectors but also to develop a path towards integrating ICTs for socio-economic development and transformation in South African society. The National Integrated ICT Policy green paper was gazetted in early 2014 with the White paper to be gazetted in the same year. While the emphasis of the review being to mainstream and update policy, this process has also allowed for critical reflection on the various sectors. Broadcasting in general and community

<sup>7</sup> GCIS, Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) Budget Vote 2013/14 Speech. Accessed: 06/09/2013. Available from: <http://www.gcis.gov.za/content/newsroom/speeches/MDDA-Budget-Vote-Dep-Min-Bapela-.09May2013>

media particularly has highlighted the need to adapt the funding model of public broadcasting. This paper engages some of the challenges and opportunities for community radio in the later sections and allows for discussion based on the experiences of different stations in South Africa.

### **Operating Environment**

The above are examples of institutions, statutes and policy with an impact on the environment that community radio stations operate. These various factors influence several elements that affect community radio and in this, defining the precise set of factors that contribute towards the success or failure of community radio has not been reflected clearly in policy. However, it is generally regarded that community radio can play a much greater role in promoting access to information and advancing the interesting of a majority of mostly rural and poor communities in South Africa. In recognizing the intricacies of the operating environment, this paper will allow for a focused approach to the scope of interventions necessary towards ensuring long term sustainability in the community radio segment.

### ***Social sustainability in community radio***

Fairbairn and Siemering (2006: 5) define sustainability as being “the ability of a radio station to maintain a good quality developmental broadcasting service over a period of time”. This definition emphasizes the importance of developmental broadcasting which connotes that broadcast programmes and news should impact positively on the lives of the listeners to enhance community and national development. Okoduwa (2009) states that developmental broadcasting goes beyond the traditional determinant of news values, that is, ‘Who said what, to whom, where and when?’. Closely related is the concept of developmental journalism, which according to Okoduwa (2009) is deliberately focused on an identified purpose for an identified segment of society. In this, it is structured in a language, format and character of the identified segment of society. This is the hallmark of community media and community radio in particular which allows the sense of ownership of this platform by the community it serves. This relationship defines ‘Social sustainability’ and refers to community support, both by feeling a sense of ownership and in practical ways. This paper will explore the various operational factors that impact social sustainability.

***Institutional and financial sustainability in community radio***

Analysis of the community radio operating environment will also cover elements that impact on institutional and financial sustainability. Krüger et al (2013) note that 'Institutional sustainability' refers to organisational frameworks within which the station operates. These include external factors, like the legal framework, government policy and the licensing regime. Financial sustainability relates to the most immediate reality that community radio stations need funds to be able to pay salaries/stipends, produce programmes, buy equipment, repair it when necessary, meet operational expenses, pay transmission costs and other related running costs (ibid). The ability of community radio to meet their financial commitments over time thus connotes financial sustainability.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Parameters

The aim of the study conducted was to explore the operating environment within which community radio stations operate in South Africa and establish relevant parameters for interventions in the sector. The primary concern of this investigation was to provide clarity on the several internal and external aspects that have direct and indirect implications on the operations of community radio. Having established these, the study would allow for focused in-depth discussion on issues that impact the long term sustainability of the segment.

### Research objectives

This study sort to achieve the following objectives;

- To establish the role and importance of community radio in society,
- To explore the internal factors with specific bearing on community radio operations,
- To explore the external factors with general impact on the operations of community radio,
- To narrow the scope of issues to those that have an impact on sustainability in community radio

### Exploratory research

This study as was exploratory in nature as it focused on identifying key variables in the community radio segment. The approach therefore did not make attempts aimed at defining in detail the variables within the community radio operating environment or explaining their various relationships. The rationale for adopting an exploratory approach is that the understanding established from this study would form a sound basis for more extensive study. For these reasons, this study was not limited in its focus and made no attempt to provide definite explanations to specific aspects of sustainability in community radio.

### Sampling

A sample comprising 17 community radio stations were selected representing approximately 10% of the total population of all active community radio stations in South Africa. These stations were selected using a combination of purposive and

convenience sampling techniques from sources such as the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) membership list and general internet search for active community radio stations in the various provinces. The key consideration in utilizing purposive sampling was the need to ensure a fair representation within the sample of; recently established stations (in operation for less than 5 years), small stations (not more than 10 fulltime employees), seasoned stations (in operation for more than 10 years), large stations (at least 15 fulltime employees). The selected sample ensured at least 4 stations represented in each category. The series of focus group discussions were held in 6 provinces; Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu Natal, North West, Limpopo and the Free State. Within each province, community radio stations are often located considerable distances apart from each other and this was the key consideration in applying convenient sampling. While considering the need to maintain representativeness, the selected radio stations had to be accessible without significant deviation from the designated routes.

### **Sources of data**

This study utilized both secondary and primary sources of data. The initial stages of this research were mainly consumed by a literature search to establish the appropriate context for a series of subsequent focus group interviews conducted with community radio stations. The review of literature was limited to published articles and policy briefs by the FXI and other academic research by the Wits Radio academy, official documents released by relevant South African government departments such as the Department of Communications (DoC), Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as well as annual reports and commissioned research by quasi- government bodies such as the Media Development and Diversity Agency.

The instrument used to collect primary data were a series of focus group discussions that hosted key personnel from community radio stations. In total, 17 focus group discussions were conducted and these targeted participation of station management, technical and support staff from each radio station. Prior to hosting the discussions, each station was contacted via telephone and e-mail correspondence that introduced the FXI, the research agenda and subsequent request for participation. Each session allowed for further explanation of the objectives of the on-going research, terms of participation including the consent to having the session recorded as well as the right of respondents to withdraw from the focus group discussions at any time. These terms were agreed to through the signing of a standard consent form.

## FINDINGS

A total of 17 community radio stations participated in a series of focus group discussions based on the broad research theme. The table below presents basic details of the name, location, licensing, structure and visions of the respective community radio stations.

**Table 1: Community radio stations details**

NAME	PROVINCE	LOCATION	EST.	TYPE OF LICENSE	ORG. STRUCTURE <sup>8</sup>	VISION
Bushbuckridge Radio	Mpumalanga	Bushbuckridge	1996	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Social and cultural values promotion <sup>9</sup>
Aganang FM	North West	Potchefstroom	2009	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Community empowerment and development <sup>10</sup>
PUK FM	North West	Potchefstroom	2006	Community of Interest	Tall	Community empowerment and development
Life FM	North West	Klerksdorp	2012	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Social and cultural values promotion
Star FM	North West	Klerksdorp	2006	Community Broadcasting license	Tall	Community empowerment and development
Mokopane Community Radio	Limpopo	Mokopane	2003	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Community empowerment and development
Moletsi Community Media	Limpopo	Moletsi	2000	Community Class License	Flat	Community empowerment and development
Radio Turf	Limpopo	Mankweng	1995	Community Broadcasting license	Tall	Community empowerment and development
Radio Mams	Gauteng	Mamelodi	2010	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Community empowerment and development
Diepsloot Radio	Gauteng	Diepsloot	2013		Flat	Community empowerment and development
Jози FM	Gauteng	Soweto	1995	Community Broadcasting license	Tall	Community empowerment and development
Chai FM	Gauteng	Raedene	2008	Community of Interest	Tall	Social and cultural values promotion
Good News Community Radio	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Canelands	2008	Community of Interest		Social and cultural values promotion
Hindvani Radio	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Chatsworth	1999	Community Broadcasting license	Tall	Social and cultural values promotion
IzwiloMzansi Community Radio	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Durban Station	1998	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Community empowerment and development
Inanda Community Radio	Kwa-Zulu Natal	Inanda	2002	Community Broadcasting license	Flat	Community empowerment and development
Kovsie FM	Free State	Bloemfontein	1994	Community Broadcasting license	Tall	Community empowerment and development

<sup>8</sup> Organizational structure of each radio station is either tall or flat; where the tall structure represents one that has a long chain of command and management levels increase as the organization grows and each management rank has a small area of control. On the other hand, the flat structure depicts fewer management levels where each level controls a broad area and focus is placed on empowering employees as opposed to adhering to the chain of command.

<sup>9</sup> Social and cultural values promotion: bringing people with different ethnic backgrounds together, and promoting religious and cultural values.

<sup>10</sup> Community empowerment and development: includes capacitating staff, and involving different groups in the community in activities that produce positive outcomes.



## Community radio station listenership

The listenership of community radio stations is segmented based primarily on the location and language. Detail of segmentation by specific LSMs was not immediately available; however, table 2 below provides information on which segments different community radio stations targeted and the specific platforms which they use to reach such audiences.

**Table 2: Community radio broadcast audience**

NAME	TARGET GROUP	BROADCAST	COVERAGE <sup>11</sup>	FREQUENCY	LANGUAGES <sup>12</sup>	HOURS
Bushbuckridge Radio	Youth, Middle aged	FM	-	88.4FM	Tsonga, Swati, Sepulane, Sotho, English	24 hours
Aganang FM	Youth, Middle aged	FM, Online	76-100	90.0FM	Tswana, English, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sotho	24 hours
PUK FM	PUK campus community, young professionals	FM, Online	0-25	93.6FM	Afrikaans, English	24 hours
Life FM	Christian community, Youth	FM, Online	0-25	100.6FM	English, Afrikaans, Tswana	-
Star FM	Township community, rural community	FM, Online	76-100	102.9FM	Tswana, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Sotho	24 hours
Mokopane Community Radio	Unspecified	FM	51-75	100.0FM	Afrikaans, Tsonga, Pedi, English, Ndebele	24 hours
Moletsi Community Media	Undefined	FM	51-75	98.6FM	Sepedi, Ndebele, English, Tsonga	24 hours
Radio Turf	TUT campus community	FM	76-100	103.8FM	Pedi, English	24 hours
Radio Mams	Unspecified	FM, Online	-	91.9FM	Zulu, Tswana, Sotho, Tsonga, English	24 hours
Diepsloot Radio	Undefined	Online	-	Online	English, Pedi, Tswana, Zulu, Venda, Xhosa	24 hours
Jozi FM	Soweto community	FM, Online, TV	-	105.8FM	English, Pedi, Tswana, Zulu, Venda, Sotho, Swati, Ndebele, Tsonga	24 hours
Chai FM	Jewish community	FM, Online	-	101.9FM	English, Hebrew	24 hours
Good News Community Radio	Christian community	FM, Online	-	93.6FM	English, Zulu, Afrikaans	24 hours
Hindvani Radio	Hindu community, Indian listeners,	FM, Online	76-100	91.5FM	Hindi, English	24 hours
IzwiloMzansi Community Radio	Youth, Middle aged,	FM, Online	76-100	98.0FM	Zulu, Xhosa, English	24 hours
Inanda Community Radio	Unspecified	FM, Online	76-100	88.4FM	Zulu, Xhosa, English	24 hours
Kovsie FM	Youth	FM, Online	76-100	97.0FM	English, Sotho, Afrikaans	24 hours

<sup>11</sup> Range: 0-25, 26-50, 51-75, 76-100, >100

<sup>12</sup> The order in which the languages appear denotes the most spoken languages to the least spoken.

## **Broadcast messaging and Community Role**

### ***Programming***

The programming schedules of participant community radio stations suggest that they all aim to develop their respective communities. The primary means through which most stations have achieved this is through information, education and entertainment. Although in varying proportions, most stations indicated that they aired current affairs programmes, health and wellness programmes, as well as school programmes providing an important source of empowerment for different groups including women, children, the disabled and the elderly. However, radio stations such as Life FM and Chai FM indicated that they carried a specific message throughout their programming which is aligned to the promotion of religious values and cultural values (in the case of Hindvani Radio) that further moral regeneration. Unlike the majority of the radio stations, only Inanda Community Radio aimed to teach the community about their rights and democracy as a means to address the high levels of social and political intolerance in the north-west region of Durban.

### ***Community role in determining content***

It was stated by the majority of the radio stations that the community played a major role in determining the content they broadcasted. The primary mechanism for this engagement was identified by the stations as established through listener's forums. Radio Mams offers the Mamelodi township residents a bi-monthly opportunity to participate in determining its programming schedule. Jozi FM has a corporate social investment department which consults with the Soweto community and uses the findings obtained to adjust their programming. However, a degree of caution was raised in the use of listener's forums; Inanda Community Radio stated that the listener's forum had been introduced but had to be removed because certain individuals and groups took advantage of the platform and used it inappropriately for political campaign. Fewer stations indicated the use of formal engagements such as face to face interviews. Only Life FM had undertaken door-to-door programming interviews. However, as indicated by IzwiloMzansi Community Radio it was clear that although the community participates in consultations on preferred programming, most radio stations do take responsibility for final programming decisions.

### ***Other services to the community***

All community radio stations that participated in this study are involved in varying forms of community service. The majority of stations indicated that in this effort, they mostly partnered with both government and non-governmental organizations and businesses to provide the community with various services and in some cases, goods. Typical examples of community services rendered by community radio stations ranged from the provision of food parcels, provision of sanitary towels and condoms to free services such as funeral announcements, assisting with funeral arrangements, finding lost children, counselling, hosting social functions, drug rehabilitation programmes, social campaigns, and other similar activities. As most stations highlighted, providing community services is a crucial part of their operations; however, as Kovsie FM indicated, they are limited in the extent of community work they can engage in primarily due to the lack of staff capacity.

### ***Community radio success record***

All the radio stations have impacted their communities in one or more areas and fulfil their mandate of educating, informing and entertaining their communities. The majority of responses of the positive impacts they have extended to the community included among them the promotion of social cohesion, through bringing people together and providing them with a platform to express their concerns (Radio Bushbuckridge). Aganang FM was involved in charitable campaigns to distribute winter clothing to underprivileged community members in Potchefstroom. Other stations indicated that their programming had been central towards the socio-economic empowerment of their communities and the youth in particular. Good News Community Radio is involved in a programme that cares for and counsels women who are pregnant and are in crisis through a network of support organizations.

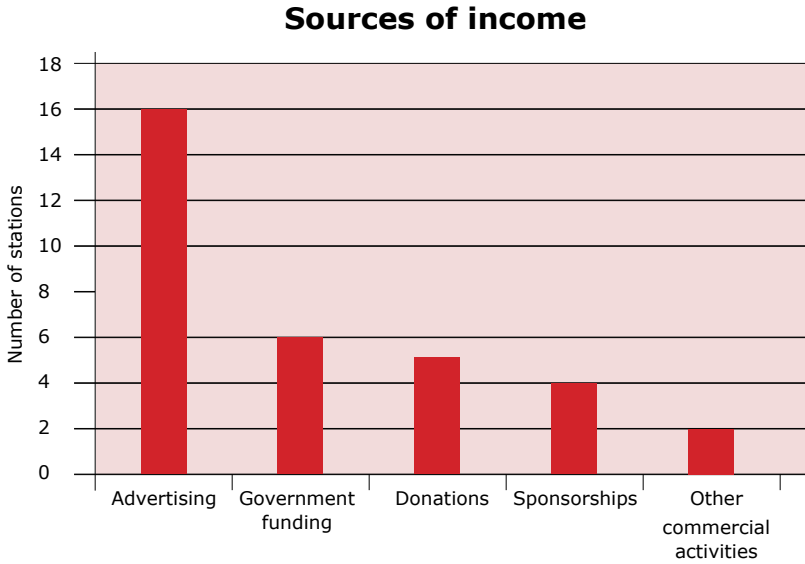
### **Internal Sustainability Factors**

#### ***Sources of funding and financial challenges***

Advertising was highlighted as the major source of funding for all community radio stations in this study, with the exception of Diepsloot Radio and Moletsi Media. Subsequent to advertising, other sources of income for most radio stations are received from government through the MDDA. Less than half the stations indicated that they have received donations and even less received sponsorships from various philanthropic

organizations, either as money, training or equipment. Of all responses obtained, only Moletsi FM is running sustainable non-advertising related income generating projects to supplement funding received from advertising and/or government. The funding model adopted by Moletsi FM allows for additional income from horticulture venture as well as a ICT training and service centre.

**Figure 1: Sources of Funding**



## **Competition**

The perceptions of competition to community radio stations were mostly referenced to securing potential advertisers. Most accounts given by the stations of direct competition noted the main competition in the segment as commercial radio stations operating within the same coverage. Radio Bushbuckridge and Aganang FM highlighted that the source of this competition emanates from an improper understanding of the role played by community radio among key advertisers in private business and in some circumstances, government departments as well. Participant community radio stations have an appreciation of the different roles which they serve as compared to commercial radio stations and to this extent did not see commercial radio stations directly impacting on their core advertising base. Aganang FM and Moletsi FM emphasised that commercial media is not competition for community media, explaining that their mandate and target groups are significantly different. A few stations such as Moko-pane Radio and Hindvani Radio noted with concern that, although they realized this difference in mandate, commercial stations in some cases are encroaching on their mandate by offering localized community based services. Other competitors noted by a minority of the respondents included print media, although to a much lesser severity than radio platforms.

## **Technical capacity**

Technical capacity was discussed with primary reference to the functionality, relevance and reliability of studio equipment (computers, mixers, microphones etc.) and more importantly, transmission equipment such as signal transmitters. Challenges in both regards were experienced by the majority of stations. The primary concerns raised were with regard to studio equipment being prohibitively expensive to purchase and maintain. Radio Bushbuckridge and PUK FM in particular noted that when their studio equipment breaks down, they do not have the required skilled staff to repair equipment, and often have to travel to Johannesburg to get spares and repairs done. With regard to standard maintenance of equipment, both stations have adopted a “if it’s not broken, don’t to fix it” approach. In terms of transmission capacity, most stations noted that the rapid advances in technology had left them behind on the latest transmission technologies. Half of all stations noted that they still use analogue transmission facilities and because of this were not able to fully utilize their capacity. Radio Turf explained how terrestrial positioning has had negative implications on their listenership as well as advertising opportunities.

## **Human resources**

Community radio stations are considered a training ground for media practitioners providing a means for talented personnel to begin their careers in the media. This position is generally accepted by most community radio station management. However, they noted that the current economic circumstances had made it difficult to maintain the minimum threshold of staff to allow optimum operations. With the exception of Diepsloot Radio, all the radio stations experienced difficulties retaining their staff. The primary reason attributed to this was that most community radio stations cannot afford to hire permanent staff and depend mostly on volunteer staff that is paid a stipend. As a result, most experienced personnel opt for more attractive remuneration within commercial radio stations. Other issues noted with regard to human resources were more directly related to skills and training. While a few stations such as Radio Mams indicated that they had received sponsorships for staff development, most stations noted the need for greater training opportunities to compensate for the gaps in institutional memory created by the high rate of staff turnover. These opportunities were required in specific areas such as technical producers and sound engineers.

## **External Sustainability Factors**

### **Private actors**

The majority of community radio stations have not experienced confrontations with external private actors in attempts to influence their operations in the management and control of their respective stations. Chai FM experienced a takeover attempt which was unsuccessful. However, in few instances, it was noted that attempts have been made indirectly to influence the content of programming aligned to interest groups. For example, political groups have in the past attempted to influence stations such as Moletsi FM. In this case however, the matter was resolved through strict compliance with reference to the conditions set out by the ICASA license regulations.<sup>13</sup> Not all external influence has been negative; Star FM indicated that they had received positive influence from groups they are affiliated with, helping to advance their level of professionalism in community radio ministry.

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<sup>13</sup> These prohibit community radio stations from either siding with or giving preference to any political party.

### **Regulatory Framework**

The respondents included in this study indicated strict compliance with the legal and regulatory conditions stipulated by the various governing bodies; issues were raised concerning the implication of the current framework as shown in the table below:

**Table 3: Regulation in community media**

ASPECT OF REGULATION	DESCRIPTION	EXPERIENCE
Application process and procedures	Breaks in transmission due to licensing gaps	Moletsi FM, TUT FM
Reporting and monitoring procedures	Improve monitoring systems; Reporting time; Information dissemination by relevant departments	Chai FM, Hindvani Radio, Inanda Community Radio
Financing requirements and compliance	Limitations on types of advertising; Sources of financial income;	IzwiloMzansi Community Radio
Language restrictions	Challenges due to financial and staff limitations	Mokopane Radio
Location and transmission requirements	Terrestrial challenges not considered; Safety and security of persons and equipment not considered	Radio Turf
Stakeholder participation	Limited platforms for direct policy and legal process consultation	All stations

### **Internet and social media**

Community radio stations note that generally, the implications of the internet and social media are not as pronounced primarily because of limited access to the internet and relatively low penetration rates of mobile phone usage, particularly in the low income and rural communities they serve. However, it was observed that all stations are present on several social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The activity of community radio stations on these platforms was assessed to be moderate to low. It is significant to note that a majority of participants in this study do publish their broadcast online using streaming services such as TuneIn Internet Radio. Chai FM noted that this has helped establish them as one of the leading Jewish radio stations outside Israel, and this has expanded their financial opportunities through a global audience. However, for most stations including Aganang FM and Star FM the internet

only assisted in improving interactions with listeners and contributions to programming with no impact on income. Furthermore, some stations indicated that social media had in actual fact yielded negative implications on listenership among communities. Jozi FM attributed declining listenership to greater use of Facebook, Twitter and Mxit as alternate sources of information and entertainment as opposed to community radio.

### ***The role of associations***

Generally, the media sector has several active representative organizations and within community radio, the most prominent being the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) established as a platform for networking and exchanging ideas. Most stations that participated in this study acknowledged membership with the NCRF but also noted that the body had not directly advanced any of their interests. The majority of the radio stations had not had any legal action taken against them, although some respondents had received threats from individuals and/or companies. Bodies such as the NCRF would ideally assist in such matters. In this regard, only PUK FM noted its membership with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) as having represented them in a class action matter against ICASA. Although to a lesser extent, other representative organizations noted to have had a positive influence are; the South African Music Rights Organization (SAMRO), South African Audience Research Foundation and the National Charter.

### **Prospects for the Future**

Sustainability and growth in the sector were referred to as the most immediate concerns and areas that should be addressed in the medium to long term. Bushbuckridge Radio recommended that any attempts towards the solution of sustainability in the community radio segment should be by prioritising increased budgetary support for the sector and more opportunities for direct engagement. Good News Community Radio summed up the prospects for the future in the segment in strengthening the connection between the grassroots and the world, and prioritising the youth as the key target for remodelling the future of South African social and moral fabric. A recurring theme in prospects for the future in community radio was the need to embrace the use of technology as it becomes more and more central to people's lives.



## DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the intricacies of the environment within which community radio stations operate and provide possible insight into the key elements affecting their overall sustainability. In this, it is critical to appreciate the nature of key relationships that define community radio stations. The discussion that follows distinguishes between relationships and influences and assesses the overall effect of the various factors in a practical way. The data presented in the previous section indicates that community involvement, regulations, financing, human resources and technical capacity affect the operations and the sustainability of community radio stations. This succeeding section will assess these key factors and explain in greater detail how the relationships have affected community media in South Africa.

### **The centrality of community**

The community radio stations and the community within which they operate cannot be separated. As shown in the previous section, the communities rely on their local radio station as a source of information, education and entertainment. Through their programming, community radio stations are able to reach people and impact their lives positively through civil-political empowerment and more importantly, socio-economic development. A critical observation on the interactions between community radio stations and their respective communities indicates that in order for community radio stations to fulfil their mandates relevantly and appropriately; the community has to in turn meet a dual obligation. This lies specifically in shaping the vision and governance of stations as well as contributing towards end-user generated content.

### **Vision and governance**

An observation made regarding the structural formation of the stations was that the majority of the stations did not have a clearly stated vision and subsequent goals for the station. Also evident was that due to such challenges, staff involvement and operations of the stations were negatively affected. This also inferred that if there are internal strategic problems affecting operations, it would be an even greater challenge if the community is not appropriately accommodated within the governance structures. This is further discussed in relation to human resource capacity in subsequent discussion. It was observed that without these structural issues addressed, most operations are affected and hinder progress and long term social sustainability.

## **End user-generated content**

The community's role in determining the content is crucial given the nature of community radio station mandates. This is the primary distinction in that community radio deals with specific issues that cannot adequately be addressed by commercial radio. The findings suggest that although considerable efforts are made to involve the community through listeners' forums, these are often stifled by limited commitment to this cause by management of community radio. This attitude on the part of most management was based on the conception that listeners' forum are often abused as a platform to effectively consult and are hi-jacked by interested groups seeking to influence the station based on the views of a minority. While there are disparities in how the stations structure and conduct their consultations, few radio stations made efforts to actively involve the community in such ways that fostered a sense of ownership by community and ensure social sustainability.

## **Regulation and support**

Regulations define the boundaries of the community radio operating environment and form a critical component that contributes to institutional sustainability in the segment. It is noted that the major external concern identified by community radio stations were centred upon the regulatory framework enforced by ICASA. These regulations substantially affect strategic planning but also have implications for the operational decisions made by management and staff. The constraints placed upon community radio stations extend to decisions on how the stations are licensed, procedure and limitations on sources of financing; human resources, and technical capacitation. The prevailing contention among station managers was that the regulatory framework was created an uncondusive environment for community radio stations to thrive. Although most community radio stations had not participated in any consultative policy making processes, all remained adamant that their compliance with the current set of regulations was the greatest threat to institutional sustainability among community radio stations.

## **Financing**

Insights from the views presented on financing regulations by various community radio stations point towards the need for a review of the funding model prescribed in the various regulatory frameworks. An angle that has not been adequately con-

sidered is whether or not community radio station management has the ability to utilize the various opportunities within the confines of current regulation to ensure financial sustainability. Although advertising is and may well remain the major source of income for most radio stations; alternative means of generating income to sustain operations exist through diversified income generating activities. It is conceivable that the regulations stipulated may not be comprehended in the same manner by station management. Some of the radio stations that participated in this study have been able to raise substantial funds through innovative means that involve the community. This suggests that financial unsustainability among most community radio station may be a structural problem as opposed to regulatory issues. It is further noted that the supportive institutions such as the MDDA may have created a culture of dependency. What can therefore be drawn is that, while there are restrictive measures in the regulatory framework, much still need to be explored on how capacity to ensure financial sustainability is developed practically and this should ideally require greater involvement of the immediate communities served by radio stations.

### ***Licensing***

The primary concern in licensing of community radio stations were in the inefficiency of ICASA in determining the award of new licenses and renewal of existing licenses. The process and content of the application process is noted as a major challenge as the bureaucracy involved often leads of gaps in licensing. While all stations that had been granted renew licenses, in some instances upgrading from 1 year to 4 year community of interest licenses; the uncertainty in the process has negative implications on the strategic planning task of management and the board of community radio stations.

### ***Implications of regulation on operations***

The regulatory framework has similarly negative effects on operational aspects particularly financing and the overall sustainability of community radio stations. Licensing and transmission restrictions limit the reach and ultimately, the listenership community radio station can secure. With this restriction, the main source of financing is threatened and this in turn adds increasing burden to other factors such as human resources and technical capacity. This forces compromise on the standards and practices by management, particularly with regard to human resources and technical capacity, and these in turn perpetuate the cycle of unsustainability.

## **Human resources and capacity**

Community radio stations play an important role in providing opportunities for training and development of inexperienced personnel, empowering them with skills that enhance their capacity to pursue careers in the media sector. Predominantly, community radio stations accept the reality that they are essentially a training ground for media professionals. However, the inability to maintain a minimum threshold of staff to ensure optimum operations was a major concern. This problem has been further worsened by the general depression on the labour market. Most community radio stations find themselves in a continuous process of training, with little development which affects the quality of services provided. The resultant low levels of professionalism and lack of technical skills affect the ability of community radio to attract new and long term business.

## **AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Relationship between community and radio**

The centrality of community engagement and involvement in community radio strategic and operational activities is a key finding that warrants further in-depth investigation. It is apparent that if community radio stations are to achieve any form of long term sustainability, the mechanisms that guide and mandate them to engage their respective communities need to be assessed from a structural and attitudinal perspective. The concerns expressed in this study require a focused approach to this issue in the main, as well as other factors that will allow a concise comprehension of who the role of the community can be enhanced for social, institutional and financial sustainability.

### **Relevance of policy and legislation**

The overarching implications of regulation in community radio have been emphasized in the presentation and discussion sections of this paper. However, while the roles of the regulatory framework, including policy and legislation are clear in their objective, the relevance of the specific requirements in the rapidly changing information communications era necessitates further analysis. The increasing demand for access to a diverse range of information by a growing audience requires that community radio stations adapt to match the changes in their external operating environment. However, this should be within the confines of the existing regulatory environment. Further research should assess the scope for adaption to change within the existing policy and legal framework. Challenges and opportunities drawn should provide a basis for adjustment and in this ensuring that community radio remains a relevant and sustainable media within communities.

## CONCLUSION

The evidence collected in this study indicates the importance of the correct operating environment for community radio if it is to play a part in meeting its developmental broadcasting objectives of educating; informing and entertaining the communities they serve. Community radio remains the most readily available means of access to information for the majority of poor communities in South Africa. In this regard, the purpose served by community radio within communities is elevated to encompass greater significance in the promotion of active citizens and participation at the local level. In a rapidly changing socio-economic and civil-political context, it is therefore vital that the long term sustainability of this medium be ensured. This study explored the operating environment and narrows the scope of issues impacting on social, institutional and financial sustainability of community radio. The influence of government regulation and community participation were identified as the primary concerns for sustainability.

Government, through ICASA and the various broadcasting legal and policy instruments, has immediate responsibilities for community media and community radio in particular which include: the allocation and management of radio frequency spectrum; regulation of spectrum and content among others. How these responsibilities are fulfilled can greatly affect the long term sustainability of community radio in South Africa. These concerns require further examination in order to ensure that efforts of government are influenced for apt and suitable regulatory response. On the other end of the spectrum, the role of communities requires further exploration to ensure that it is exercised with positive effect. This study revealed the centrality of community and the need to ensure that the relationship between the two entities is enhanced on multiple levels of engagement. These areas are vital and should be the focus of efforts to ensure social, institutional and financial sustainability of community radio in South Africa.

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### **About the Freedom of Expression Institute**

The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) is a not for profit non-governmental organization which was established in 1994 to protect and foster the right to freedom of expression. The FXI envisions a society where everyone enjoys freedom of expression and the right to access and disseminate information and knowledge. The FXI's primary objectives are; to fight for and defend freedom of expression, to oppose censorship, to fight for the right of equal access to information and knowledge, and to promote access to media and a free press.

### **Programmes**

The FXI currently is engaged in the following programmes; Anti-censorship Programme, Access to Information Programme, Media and ICTs Programme. The Anti-Censorship Programme has been monitoring the South African environment for freedom of expression violations and lobbies against censorship and its causes. The Access to Information programme aims to address practical problems in ensuring much greater usage of the Constitutional right of access to information. The Media & and ICTs programme advocates for universal service and access, in addition to plurality of the media, broadcasting and telecommunication; and policy regulation and access.

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