



**SUBMISSION ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING
CORPORATION'S APPLICATION FOR LICENCE
AMENDMENTS**

Freedom of Expression Institute

Submitted to the Independent Communications Authority of
South Africa

9 June 2004

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1. Introduction

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) had lodged an application with the Independent Communications Authority (Icasa) for amendments to its licences. In this submission we address ourselves to a number of issues that have been raised by the SABC directly in its application. We also address those issues that are not directly raised but that, we believe, are implied or have a direct bearing on the consideration that not only Icasa but a number of other stakeholders, including parliament, and the broader society, have to take into account.

We note that in spite of Icasa having granted an extension for responses to the document, there has still been insufficient time to consider all the matters in depth. We therefore request an oral hearing to address the matters raised by this submission. More specifically, we would like to be heard on specific recommendations regarding the SABC's proposed licence conditions, as this submission merely raises principles that should guide the development of these conditions.

This submission will address the following areas of the SABC's application, and will therefore be divided into the following sections:

- 1.1 The SABC's public service delivery to date
- 1.2 Legal context of the application
- 1.3 Proposed licence conditions and market conditions, including issues not raised by the SABC submission
- 1.4 Financial information

At the outset, we should note with disappointment that the SABC adopts a minimalist approach in its application, attempting to get away with the bare minimum of what is required of them in terms of the law. It shows no imagination, much less leadership, in terms of the direction public broadcasting should take, and as a result there is no vision for public broadcasting that could be derived from the application: one which the public could rally behind and that could be a challenge to government to provide funding for. As a result, quasi-commercial broadcasting becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In its overview of its public service delivery to date, the SABC has not reflected on the contradictions of delivering this mandate on a largely commercial funding base, and how its attempts to manage this contradiction have led to a marginalisation of mainly poor audiences, rural audiences, older women and African languages. It fails to reflect on this darker side of the delivery question because to do so would jeopardise the argument it makes that it has proved its ability to deliver as an

independent institution. It would destroy the argument that it does not require the relevant sections of the Broadcasting Act relating to the Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) and Public Commercial Broadcasting Services (PCBS) to be particularized in licence conditions by Icasa.

The SABC also has not reflected the fact that many of the most progressive changes it has made to its programming regime has been as a result of public or government pressure. To acknowledge this point would also call into question its argument that it has proved its ability to be left to its own devices.

This submission draws on research undertaken by the FXI in 2001/ 2002. Using PBS radio as case study, it yielded a depressing picture drawn by both employees and listeners/viewers of the broadcaster.

The independence question is possibly the most critical question of all raised by the submission. The arguments the SABC puts up in this respect are contestable, to say the least. They have the effect of undermining the regulator's own independence to regulate broadcasting in the public interest.

The net effect of the SABC's arguments is that the Editorial Policies will become the undertakings made in fulfilment of the requirements of the Broadcasting Act. According to the SABC's submission, it is the 'Authorities role [to review] the policies submitted by the SABC but not programming content' (SABC application, page 43). The SABC further argues that Icasa should '[receive and review] the written instruments by means of which the SABC itself complies with its own obligations, and enjoys its own freedoms. The written instruments are, as set out above, the policies, the licence conditions, and the code of practice. (SABC application, page 44). Given the fact that the licence conditions consist of the relevant sections of the Broadcasting Act - which are by their very nature broad and general - the specific targets could only be derived from those set by the Board in terms of the editorial policies. In some areas, these targets are set in action plans that are then reviewed annually by the Board, except in relation to programming and news.

So in relation to other areas covered by the policies, the SABC will set targets, monitor their implementation and review compliance with them. Yet in relation to news and programming, there are no targets. In relation to those areas where annual targets are set, it should be noted that the targets can move; they will be made subject to the financial performance of the SABC. They do not have the status of conditions, which the SABC will have to meet on pain of action being taken by Icasa.

The fact that there are no targets for news and programming is particularly worrisome, as on what basis will compliance with the editorial policies be judged by the Board? There are in effect no indicators to measure the key performance areas.

This is not the first time that the SABC has made similar arguments. According to the SABC's submission to ICASA on local content in 1999, the Corporation requested the right to self-regulate and in addition to self-designate when it comes to local content programming genres. In effect, this would have that the SABC itself would undertake the monitoring and the broadcaster would make undertakings to

the regulatory authority. So the SABC would set the rules, and monitor its own compliance: player and referee.

At the time, we pointed out the fact that this request was not only dangerous - as it made independent oversight impossible - it was patently unfair to other broadcasters and would obfuscate even further the already highly-charged separation of powers within the broadcasting environment. It also denied Icasa's right to make rules and enforce them: an essential function for a regulator. After all, rulemaking is at the heart of regulation. So once again the SABC wants to make its own rules, notify them to the authority, implement them, monitor their implementation and review its own performance throughout the cycle. This is a recipe for disaster, as it turns the SABC into an arbiter of its own performance with the Board acting as regulator. Inevitably, internal systems fail in the closed circle of a self-regulatory system.

Also the argument that independence will give it the flexibility to decide how to deliver the mandate across all services is flawed. Many South Africans still do not receive a multitude of services. There are many South Africans who rely completely on SABC PBS radio. These services need to be regulated carefully to ensure that they provide for all aspect of the mandate *within* that particular service. Our research has shown that when the SABC is in a cash crunch, the first services to suffer are the SABC African language PBS stations.

The legal arguments made by the SABC are dealt with in greater depth in this submission.

We must also note that what passes as the SABC's finances 'for public consumption' are an insult to the intelligence of the public. They give no indication of how the global budget is broken down, which is crucial to determining affordability (and hence the need for flexible light-touch regulation). In this regard, we intend to file an information request under the Promotion of Access to Information Act to secure more detailed information.

2. The SABC's public service delivery to date

In its submission, the SABC argues that it 'has been able to make significant strides in transforming itself into an authentic public broadcaster. It is also noteworthy that this transformation has taken place largely in the absence of ongoing government funding. The SABC has therefore had to make this delivery while also remaining commercially viable' (page 32)

This is not the full picture. Rather than being motivated by a Saul-to-Paul conversion to public broadcasting, many of the most progressive aspects of change have been effected in more was not done to address the programming needs of South Africans in languages of their choice. In fact the SABC has proved consistently that it will take its mandate seriously on when pressure is applied to it, which further makes the case for strong external oversight mechanism coupled with measurable targets set through licencing conditions. This part of the picture is not presented by the SABC.

In fact, the SABC is being rather disingenuous about what has motivated many of the most recent advances in public broadcasting, such as the XiTsonga and Tshivenda news broadcasts. The reality of the matter is that since 1994, when expectations began to rise that previously marginalized languages would also benefit from the gains of the transformation agenda, there has been a groundswell of support for the inclusion and mainstreaming of the two languages, and others such as Isindebele and Siswati. In fact, there were, at some stage, groups that were organized specifically to lobby for the inclusion of African languages. The BEE emphasis in the commissioning procedures also happened after a huge stink about the non-application of the procedures in a manner that favoured the old white production companies.

Another picture that is not presented involves the contradictions emerging from the SABC attempting to achieve its public service mandate using commercial funding. In its submission, the SABC has payed scant attention to the fact that real contradictions are apparent, especially in relation to poor listeners and viewers.

In 2001, the FXI embarked on a two-year project focusing on the South African Broadcasting Corporation, consisting of two stages. The first stage, undertaken in 2001, involved an assessment of the SABC from the perspective of employees, management, the regulator, the Department of Communications and the Portfolio Committee on Communications. The second stage, undertaken in 2002, involved qualitative audience research on the extent to which public radio was meeting its mandate. More specifically the research intended to:

- Encourage listeners to express their views on SABC services in one forum (which will make the audience research process much easier).
- Create a forum for audiences to interact with SABC stations directly.
- Inform listeners about the contents of the Broadcasting Charter if they are not aware of its contents, and facilitating discussion about whether the Charter is sufficiently reflective of the SABC's public obligations
- Encourage the organisation of listeners to speak back to the SABC about the nature and quality of its services.

A summary of the findings of the research are attached (Addendum 1). The research was published in a book entitled 'Public Broadcasting in the Era of Cost Recovery: A Critique of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's Crisis of Accountability', published in 2003.

The picture that emerged from an aggregation of the views expressed during the research was that the SABC had engaged in a process of 'crowding out' poorer listeners in response to a financial crisis in the Corporation in 1999. In the 1999/2000 financial year, the corporation posted a deficit of R28 121 000, compared to a surplus of R120 404 000 for the previous year. In addition, out of the 19 divisions, only seven were shown to be profitable at an operational level. In a report commissioned by the SABC in May 2000, Gemini Consulting estimated that the corporation would run up losses of between R200 million and R300 million per annum until 2006, unless significant government funding or debt financing was made available. The PBS division would be unprofitable, with losses escalating to R441 million per annum by 2004. The PCBS division would be profitable only in 2002, and then it would make only negligible profits.² The profitable services have simply been unable to afford to cross-subsidise the unprofitable ones, the overwhelming majority of which are the SABC's most popular services, namely the PBS stations.

In an attempt to rescue the situation without government funding, the SABC embarked on a process to stabilise the corporation, including its finances. This involved the development of a long-term sustainability plan, including a plan to secure the corporation's top leadership, a review of its processes and procedures, and a plan to stabilise revenues and control costs.

In 2002, the SABC announced that it had achieved "success in stabilising the business", and was now ready to focus on the policies that impact on content, such as programming and news. The corporation had managed to achieve a net surplus of R7 067 000, slightly higher than its surplus of R5 249 000 for the 2000/ 2001 financial year.

At the heart of the stabilisation plan has been a decision to drive all SABC services towards self-sufficiency. Focussing mainly on PBS radio, the research noted a number of trends flowing from the self-sufficiency drive, which are summarized in Addendum 1 under the following headings:

- The drive towards self-sufficiency have led to a commercialisation of stations
- Commercial imperatives have forced a bias towards the 'educated class
- Commercial imperatives have forced an urban bias on stations
- Commercial imperatives have forced a Gauteng-bias on stations
- Commercialisation has led to a bias towards English
- Commercial imperatives have led to a marginalisation of (mainly older) women
- Commercial imperatives had led to changes in uneconomic formats and dropping of uneconomic programmes
- Commercial imperatives have led to insufficient promotion of South African talent, especially in relation to music
- Commercially-driven changes have led to a lack of consultation with staff

- Commercial imperatives have lessened the accessibility of stations to listeners
- News was characterized by a 'hegemony of officialdom'
- There was an even investment in programme between the African language stations and a station like SAFM
- There is an uneven development of technologies between African language stations and stations like SAFM and Radio Sonder Grense.

The research further showed that despite the fact that it claims to be catering for all sectors of the society, those within the broadcaster are agreed that the SABC is geared at catering for the higher LSM listeners and viewers. The following observations were made with regard to how these changes and shifts take place:

In some cases stations do not change programming as such but reduce the time allocated to programmes that are viewed as not attracting advertisements and sponsorships. These are usually programmes that are aimed at the rural and elderly listeners. The trend is to cut programmes to about fifteen (15) minutes.

The shift towards being stations that are also concerned with generating revenue has not only raised questions around the very nature of PBS but also how these stations can still be said to be reaching out to a broader audience and serving that audience equally. The shift also raises the question of the stations' own identities.

A critical question was posed by one producer on the issue of stations having to meet certain revenue targets. The producer observed that the implication of a station being expected to meet certain revenue targets implies that a station should have a target audience. That simply means the station having to dump a portion of their listeners who are considered not to be strategic enough in the station's attempt to attract advertisers and sponsors. What then would be the meaning of public service? Who will be the public? What this means is that the station will have to scale down its public obligation.

The above demonstrates a systematic effort to ensure that stations achieve their revenue targets. This is obviously done at the expense of lower LSM listeners. The nett effect of the application as lodged is that the above trend will be formalized. It is currently happening by 'default', that is, legally speaking. If passed, it is possible that lower LSM viewers [what is happening in radio can as well be applied in television] can be migrated to regional television stations so that the existing channels are freed up for audiences and the kind of programming that is attractive to advertisers.

Some listeners felt that gradually, most stations have become mediums for the middle classes. Particularly excluded are rural area residents. Women who live in these areas, the very ones who rely on radio for their information and entertainment, felt the most excluded by the programming coming out of the stations. This is a sad tale to tell given the poverty levels in most of the rural areas and the fact that most of the rural residents depend on SABC radio for all their information needs. Again, the net effect of formalizing the applied-for licensing conditions will be that these listeners might permanently be excluded from the programming mix of the stations.

3. Legal context of the application

3.1 POWERS AND DUTIES OF ICASA

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (“**ICASA**”) was established by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act 13 of 2000 (“**the Icasa Act**”) to replace the Independent Broadcasting Authority (“**the IBA**”) as well as the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (“**SATRA**”). ICASA is the institution contemplated in section 192 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (“**the Constitution**”), which provides that:

“National legislation must establish an independent authority to regulate broadcasting in the public interest, and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society”.

ICASA was established in recognition of the fact that technological and other developments in the fields of broadcasting and telecommunications are causing a rapid divergence in these fields and that the creation of an independent body was required to regulate both telecommunications and broadcasting.

ICASA may exercise the powers conferred upon the former authorities, the IBA and SATRA, in terms of the “underlying statutes”, namely the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 153 of 1993 and the Telecommunications Act 103 of 1996. So much is clear from section 4 of the Icasa Act, which provides, *inter alia*:

“4. **Functions of Authority.**—(1) The Authority—

(a) must perform the duties imposed upon the former authorities by or under the underlying statutes;

(b) may exercise the powers conferred upon the former authorities by or under the underlying statutes;

...”.

Accordingly, ICASA has the power, *inter alia*:

- 1.1.2 to administer the statutory scheme for granting, renewing and amending broadcasting licences, by virtue of section 13(1)(a) of the IBA Act;
- 1.1.3 to manage broadcasting services frequency bands and other parts of the radio frequency spectrum properly delegated to it by the Minister of Telecommunications; (section 13(1)(b) of the IBA Act).

Interestingly, until the promulgation of the Broadcasting Amendment Act 64 of 2002, ICASA had the express power, in terms of section 13(1)(d) of the IBA Act, to design and implement broadcasting conditions of licence consistent with the objectives set out in the Broadcasting Act for different categories of broadcasting service, including, but not limited to conditions relating to: local content requirements; programme requirements; coverage obligations; language service provision; ownership and control compliance; compliance with the Code of Conduct for Broadcasting Services and empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups.

It should not be thought that the effect of the amendment to section 13 of the IBA Act, is to preclude ICASA from designing and implementing license conditions relating to local content requirements, programme requirements, language service provision or compliance with a Code of Conduct for Broadcasting Services. Indeed, ICASA has been given the broad power, when granting a broadcasting license, to impose any term, condition or obligation appropriate to such license. Section 43(2) of the IBA Act provides that:

“43(2) Subject to the provisions of this Act, the Authority, in granting any broadcasting licence pursuant to a ruling in terms of section 42 (3) (c), may impose such terms, conditions and obligations appropriate to such licence and consistent with the objects and principles as enunciated in section 2, as it deems fit.”

ICASA has thus been given a broad discretion to design and impose terms, conditions and obligations on broadcasting licensees.

That discretion must, of course, be exercised in accordance with the dictates of section 2 of the IBA Act. That provision stipulates that broadcasting must be regulated, in the public interest, so as to:

- “(a) promote the provision of a diverse range of sound and television broadcasting services on a national, regional and local level which, when viewed collectively, cater for all language and cultural groups and provide entertainment, education and information;
- (b) promote the development of public, commercial and community broadcasting services which are responsive to the needs of the public;
- (c) ensure that broadcasting services, viewed collectively—
 - (i) develop and protect a national and regional identity, culture and character;
 - (ii) provide for regular—
 - (aa) news services;

- (bb) actuality programmes on matters of public interest;
 - (cc) programmes on political issues of public interest; and
 - (dd) programmes on matters of international, national, regional and local significance;
- (d) protect the integrity and viability of public broadcasting services;
- (e) ensure that, in the provision of public broadcasting services—
- (i) the needs of language, cultural and religious groups;
 - (ii) the needs of the constituent regions of the Republic and local communities; and
 - (iii) the need for educational programmes,
- are duly taken into account;
- (f) encourage ownership and control of broadcasting services by persons from historically disadvantaged groups;
- (gA) promote the empowerment and advancement of women in the broadcasting services;
- (g) encourage equal opportunity employment practices by all licensees;
- (h) ensure that broadcasting services are not controlled by foreign persons;
- (i) ensure that commercial and community broadcasting licences, viewed collectively, are controlled by persons or groups of persons from a diverse range of communities in the Republic;
- (j) impose limitations on cross-media control of commercial broadcasting services;
- (k) promote the most efficient use of the broadcasting services frequency bands;
- (l) ensure that public broadcasting licensees, commercial broadcasting licensees and signal distribution licensees comply with internationally accepted technical standards;
- (m) ensure that broadcasting signal distribution facilities are made available in respect of all licensed broadcasting services;
- (n) refrain from undue interference in the commercial activities of licensees, whilst at the same time taking into account the broadcasting needs of the public;

- (o) ensure fair competition between broadcasting licensees;
- (p) promote and conduct research into broadcasting policy and technology;
- (q) encourage investment in the broadcasting industry;
- (r) promote the stability of the broadcasting industry;
- (s) ensure equitable treatment of political parties by all broadcasting licensees during any election period;
- (t) ensure that broadcasting licensees adhere to a code of conduct acceptable to the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and
- (u) encourage the provision of appropriate means for disposing of complaints in relation to broadcasting services and broadcasting signal distribution.”

In terms of section 5 of the Broadcasting Act, ICASA may “*on such conditions as it may determine*”, issue a sound or television broadcasting service licence for a specified area in several broadcasting service categories. ICASA is thus broadly empowered to issue a sound or television broadcasting service licence, on such terms and conditions as it may choose to prescribe, in three broadcasting service categories: a public broadcasting service; a commercial broadcasting service and a community broadcasting service.

3.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (“the SABC”) is a limited liability company with share capital as contemplated in the Companies Act. The state owns one hundred percent of the shares in the SABC. The SABC has both a memorandum and articles of association and the Registrar of Companies is entitled to issue such directives and authorise such deviations from the regulations in force in terms of the Companies Act and the documents prescribed in terms thereof as he may consider necessary in order to give effect to the incorporation provisions.

The SABC is organised into two separate operational entities, namely a public service and a commercial service. These two services are separately administered.

3.3 THE AMENDMENT TO THE SABC LICENSE CONDITIONS

In terms of section 22 of the Broadcasting Act,

- “(1) The Corporation must, within six months after the date of commencement of the Broadcasting Amendment Act, 2002, or the

conversion date, whichever is the later, apply to the Authority for such amendments to its existing licences as are necessary in order to reflect the reorganisation of the Corporation into the public service division and the commercial service division and its related obligations in terms of this Act and the IBA Act.

(2) The relevant provisions of the IBA Act apply with the necessary changes to the applications referred to in subsection (1) but, irrespective of the contents of the application of the Corporation, the Authority may impose any appropriate licence conditions which are necessary in order to reflect the reorganisation of the Corporation into the public service division and the commercial service division and its related obligations in terms of this Act and the IBA Act.

On 31 March 2004, the SABC submitted an application for Amendment of SABC Licences in terms of section 22 of the Broadcasting Act. In that application, the SABC has raised the issue of whether the license conditions that will be imposed by ICASA should, in its words, "*particularise the manner in which the SABC complies with its obligations in terms of sections 10 and 11*" of the Broadcasting Act. It asks:

"... are the licence conditions obliged to set out the detail of the programming, thereby illustrating the manner in which the SABC complies with those obligations, or is it sufficient merely for the licence conditions to reflect the obligations as a statement of principle?"

The SABC submits that the answer to that question can be found in section 6 of the broadcasting Act, which provides as follows:

"6 Charter of Corporation

- (1) The Corporation must comply with the charter as outlined in this part.
- (2) The Authority must monitor and enforce compliance with the charter by the Corporation.
- (3) In terms of this charter, the Corporation, in pursuit of its objectives and in the exercise of its powers, enjoys freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence as enshrined in the constitution.
- (4) The Corporation must encourage the development of South African expression by providing, in South African official languages, a wide range of programming that -
 - (a) reflects South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity;
 - (b) displays South African talent in education and entertainment programmes;

- (c) offers a plurality of views and a variety of news, information analysis from a South African point of view;
 - (d) advances the national and public interest.
- (5) (a) The board must prepare and submit to the Authority not later than three months after the date of conversion, policies that will ensure compliance with the Authority's code of conduct as prescribed and with the Corporation's licence conditions and with the objectives contained in this Act, including:
- (i) news editorial policy
 - (ii) programming policy;
 - (iii) local content policy;
 - (iv) educational policy;
 - (v) universal service and access policy;
 - (vi) language policy; and
 - (vii) religious policy.
- (b) The Corporation must notify the Authority in writing of any amendments to the policies referred to in paragraph (a) as soon as reasonably possible.
- (6) The board must ensure that there is public participation in the development of the policies referred to in sub-section (5) by inviting and considering public comment on such draft policies and by other means.
- (7) The Corporation must provide suitable means for regular inputs of public opinion on its services and ensure that such public opinion is given due consideration.
- (8) The Corporation must develop a code of practice that ensures that the services and the personnel comply with -
- (a) the constitutional principle of equality;
 - (b) the equitable treatment of all segments of the South African population;
 - (c) the constitutional requirement of equitable treatment of all official languages;
 - (d) the rights of all South Africans to receive and impart information and ideas;

- (e) the mandate to provide for a wide range of audience interests, beliefs and perspectives; and
- (f) a high standard of accuracy, fairness and impartiality in news and programmes that deal with matters of public interest.”

There can be no quarrel with suggestion that the Legislature, in enacting section 6, sought to ensure that the SABC complied with sections 10 and 11 of the Broadcasting Act, and that ICASA has an obligation to monitor and enforce compliance. Nor could it be suggested that the drafters of the Broadcasting Act did not wish to make it abundantly clear that the SABC enjoys freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence or that the SABC has the additional obligation to furnish ICASA with a document which contains the policies that the SABC will apply in order to attain compliance with sections 10 and 11.

Such statutory provisions, however, cannot be interpreted to "imply", as the SABC suggests (on page 43 of its application), that ICASA cannot impose any conditions relating to programming content.

The provisions of the Broadcasting Act do no more than impose additional obligations on the SABC. Indeed, they also impose additional obligations on ICASA, namely to review the policies submitted by the SABC and to monitor and enforce compliance with the charter by the SABC.

Perhaps the strangest submission made by the SABC is the one, on page 44 of its application, that *“The Authority in this context is a regulator; it receives and reviews the written instruments by means of which the SABC itself complies with its own obligations, and enjoys its own freedom. The written instruments are, as set out above, the policies, the licence conditions, and the code of practice. But it is the SABC itself that determines the content of these instruments.”*

To the extent that this suggests that it is the SABC that must determine the content of its own license conditions, the submission is clearly wrong. It is for ICASA to impose such terms, conditions and obligations appropriate to the SABC's licence as it deems fit, not for the SABC to dictate its own license conditions. Section 5 of the Broadcasting Act, which provides that ICASA may issue a broadcasting license *“on such conditions as it may determine”*, puts the question beyond doubt.

What the SABC seeks to avoid is the setting, by ICASA, of a framework of content, similar to that contained in the license conditions of other broadcasters operating in South Africa. The SABC's plaintive cry that *“it is not for the Authority to prescribe the SABC's programmes”* is a red herring. It is indeed not for ICASA to tell the SABC precisely which programmes it must broadcast, but that is not what is involved in making license conditions which set a framework of content. It is obviously not for ICASA to decree that the SABC must show a programme called *Isidingo* at 5 p.m. on Thursday afternoon, but stipulating a framework of content, in a license, by which the SABC must abide, does not remove the SABC's right to decide which

programmes to broadcast within that framework, or even how to vary programme content.

3.4A FRAMEWORK OF CONTENT

The SABC seeks a blank cheque; it asks for free rein, suggesting that it is not for ICASA to impose any conditions relating to programming content. That cannot be accepted, for several reasons:

3.4.1 **The SABC's request is inconsistent with a proper reading of section 6(5) of the Broadcasting Act.** That provision makes it abundantly clear that the board must prepare and submit to ICASA certain policies (including the SABC's news editorial policy, programming policy, local content policy, educational policy, to mention but a few) "*that will ensure compliance with the Authority's code of conduct as prescribed and with the Corporation's licence conditions and with the objectives contained*" (emphasis added) in the Broadcasting Act. In other words, the SABC's license conditions, which are set by ICASA, regulate the SABC's news editorial policy, programming policy, local content policy, etc. The policies to be prepared and submitted must conform to the SABC's license conditions. There can thus be no doubt that the Legislature contemplated that ICASA could impose conditions relating to programming content and the SABC would be required to match its policies with those conditions.

3.4.2 **Granting SABC's request would be inconsistent with ICASA's duties under the Constitution and the IBA Act.** ICASA, when issuing a license, must perform its regulatory function with the objectives in section 2 of the IBA Act in mind. As the regulator, ICASA must, in terms of section 2 (c), ensure that broadcasting services, "*viewed collectively*" (i) develop and protect a national and regional identity, culture and character; (ii) provide for regular news services; actuality programmes on matters of public interest; programmes on political issues of public interest; and programmes on matters of international, national, regional and local significance. ICASA could only comply with that duty if it imposes license conditions relating to programming content on all broadcasters in South Africa. If it did not do so in respect of the SABC, it would be compelled to stand back and watch what the SABC is broadcasting, and then adjust the license conditions of other broadcasters to meet the objectives of section 2(c). If it did that, in turn, it would be breaching its constitutional obligation to "*regulate broadcasting in the public interest, and to ensure fairness*"

and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society.”

(Notably, the SABC acknowledges the imperatives of section 2 of the IBA Act, yet it focuses only on sections 2(d) and (n) (see page 43 of the application.))

3.4.3 The SABC's request, if granted, would result in ICASA abdicating its responsibilities and a constitute an infringement of its independence. ICASA, the Constitution and the Icasa Act make it clear, is *the* independent regulator responsible for the regulation of broadcasting in the public interest. There is much in the application submitted by the SABC which could be read as a suggestion that ICASA must abdicate its functions to the SABC board. Simply by way of example, the SABC submits that it is “*the SABC itself that determines the content of these instruments*”, including its license conditions as one of those instruments. Again, that could not possibly be correct. ICASA is required to act independently and fairly as the regulator and, pursuant to that duty, has been afforded the power to impose such terms, conditions and obligations appropriate to each licence (consistent with the objects and principles enunciated in section 2 of the IBA Act), as it deems fit.

3.5 THE SABC'S INDEPENDENCE

The SABC makes much of the fact section 6 of the Broadcasting Act provides that in pursuit of its objectives and in the exercise of its powers, the SABC enjoys freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence as enshrined in the Constitution. It asserts that if ICASA imposed any conditions relating to programming content, its right to journalistic independence would be denied.

That submission too is hyperbole. The real purpose of section 6(3) of the Broadcasting Act is to ensure that the SABC, as a public broadcaster, does not become a state mouthpiece. The provision is there, simply by way of example, to make it abundantly clear that the SABC cannot be phoned by high-ranking politicians 5 minutes before a broadcast and told not to screen certain material. It is not suggested that that would ever happen, the provision of the Broadcasting Act simply ensures that it does not.

The fact that the SABC enjoys journalistic, creative and programming independence in the creation and implementation of the charter referred to in section 6 of the broadcasting Act does not mean that ICASA may not, in compliance with its own

constitutional and statutory duties, impose conditions relating to programming content which it deems appropriate.

3.6 SECTION 16 OF THE CONSTITUTION

Finally, the SABC asserts that the imposition of any conditions relating to programming content by ICASA would infringe the constitutional rights of the SABC. It is, presumably, relying on paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 16(1) of the Constitution, which provide, respectively, for the "**freedom of the press and other media**" and the "**freedom to receive or impart information or ideas**".

It is most unlikely that the regulation of the SABC, by merely requiring that broadcaster, along with all others, to abide by a framework of broadcasting content set out in license conditions, by the very institution with the constitutional mandate to regulate broadcasting in the public interest, would be viewed by the Constitutional Court as a violation of section 16 of the Constitution.

Even if the Constitutional Court did conclude that the setting of a framework of content constitutes an infringement of section 16, the limitation would undoubtedly be found to be reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom, in terms of section 36 of the Constitution.

4. Proposed licence conditions and market conditions, including issues not raised by the SABC submission

In this section, some general comment are made about the above-mentioned areas of the SABC application, followed by specific recommendations regarding its licence conditions.

4.1 The funding base of the SABC and the problems related to it

In its submission the SABC repeatedly makes the point that it does not receive any dedicated funding from the public, meaning any allocation either by parliament or the treasury. The broadcaster's overall income is generated 80% from commercial sources, that is, advertising and programme sponsorships. The other sources of funding are from television licenses and programme sponsorships from certain government departments.

The broadcaster also makes the point that it is expected to fulfill the public mandate as outlined in the Charter contained in the Broadcasting Act.

The implication made in the application is that there is an inherent contradiction in expecting the SABC to fulfill a public mandate whereas there is no dedicated public funding for it.

It is difficult not to have sympathy with the SABC on the above point. Yet, as we shall demonstrate later in this submission, it will be ill advisable to blindly accept the arguments advanced by the SABC without interrogating them and assessing the application against a growing body of evidence that shows that the broadcaster is not without its own faults in the equation.

In order to fully understand the contradiction that plays itself out in the above question we have to consider the nature of the political economy under, and within which, the SABC has to operate. The world is currently under the hegemony of neo-liberal politics. This means that there is a thrust towards a minimalist state role while on the other the role and power of capital is increased.

The choices taken by the South African government – neo-liberal economic policies – have been found to be unable to advance the transformation goals set out at the advent of the resolution of the political problems that besotted the country prior to 1994. According to the recently published United National Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report, inequalities in the country are growing. As many commentators have repeatedly pointed out, the GEAR policy of the government has failed to address socio-economic inequalities that were inherited from apartheid.

The neo-liberal policies have permeated different sectors of the society, leading to increased austerity measures being imposed on different sections of the society. Areas most affected by the measures include education, health, housing, water and electricity.

The media sector has not escaped these measures. As it happened in a number of northern countries, public broadcasting has not enjoyed adequate support from the state, or any form of public funding.

Lack of public funding places public broadcasters under severe pressures. In the first instance, all things being equal, it would be unfair to expect a public broadcaster to provide programming that is free of market (commercial) trappings. There is a worldwide debate around the fact that for it to offer, and add to the notion of public good, public broadcasting should receive sufficient funding from the public in order that it is able to meet set public mandates. The model of public funding has proven useful in jurisdictions such as Australia. Of course we are alive to some of the dynamics that play themselves out in such jurisdictions such as the marginalisation and ghettoisation of Aboriginal languages.

It would not be an exaggeration to argue that it seems as though the SABC is showing less interest in the possibility of expanded, and not just narrow (for regional stations and World Cup 2010), funding so that it can achieve its public mandate. If this was not the case, the SABC would have been at the forefront, not only on the occasion of applying for a license (but in other instances too) of making demands for public funding.

In fact we are left with the impression that the SABC does not want public funding. It is possible that public funding (that is not limited to regional television stations) is seen as having the potential to increase the expectation for the broadcaster will have to deliver its public mandate. It is our contention that the SABC might have been using lack of public funding to throw the debate and concerns raised by a number of players back to the face of the state, and to, in some subtle ways, silence those raising concerns about its failure to deliver the public mandate.

4.2 SABC application disengaged from government policy

Another disturbing feature of the SABC application is that it does not in any way talk to government policy to establish a publicly funded broadcasting system by 2012. In fact, it merely notes a decline in government funding. Government has recognised the fact that it will need to put money into public broadcasting if it is to meet the needs of especially impoverished South Africans. How it is going to do so - other than funding the two regional channels - is still not clear.

However, in the application, the SABC is not even making a pitch at expediting this progressive move by providing a vision of a radically different public broadcaster. It has tailored its application based on the funding status quo. This is self-defeating. The argument that the SABC has failed to present a vision that government will be prepared to fund is borne out by the application. There is no activism apparent from the SABC on this matter. If it were to throw up a bold vision, and then challenge government to live up to its policy and fund it, then at least some aspects of a proper public broadcasting system could be achieved, which could gradually be expanded as time went on. Civil society could also be mobilised around this vision, to ensure that government lives up to its policy. The SABC is not doing this. Its lack of leadership is self-defeating: in fact the boldest leadership around public broadcasting as been coming from government in recent times.

If the SABC wanted to be both visionary and prudent, it would provide the regulator with two options: the first option as stated and the second option the visionary option. It would cost both and then prevail on the regulator to motivate for funding for the second. In this respect the SABC is missing a golden opportunity.

There is also no indication of how the two regional channels will fit into the bigger picture, especially whether the SABC intends to 'ghettoise' African languages on these channels. A worst case scenario, which needs to be guarded against, is for these stations to be used as 'decoys' for the fulfillment of a 'public mandate' while other stations are left out to pursue a commercial route. No attempt is made to connect the dots in a manner that the public can make sense of, concerning the plans that the SABC has with regard to how regional television stations will function..

4.3 SABC application does not speak to level of internal monitoring capacity

In order for the SABC to take charge of particularizing its licence conditions, it would also have to demonstrate the fact that it has the internal self-regulatory capacity to do so; in other words, if it sets targets, does it have the internal capacity to monitor on an ongoing basis the extent to which it is meeting those targets. There is no evidence presented by the SABC that it has the capacity to do so, even if this approach was an option to consider seriously.

4.4 SABC application does not consider the question of In-sourced vs. outsourced television productions

The document is silent on this matter, which Icasa 'parked' for further consideration when it was raised during the local content hearings. This matter needs to be revived in the context of the re-licencing hearings. We have had no indications that the soon-to-be-established content hub will address this matter.

With respect to the provisions in the local content regulations around independent television productions, we propose that the SABC's outsourcing requirement be particularised in the licence conditions. Presently, the regulation states that 'at least 40%' of programming should come from the independent production sector. We propose that this amount be capped at 50% for the PBS channels. This amendment will mean that the SABC will need to re-establish in-house production capacity to meet this requirement, which in turn will mean a reversal of a great deal of the McKinsey restructuring which led to the SABC being transformed from being a programme producer to a publisher broadcaster. In effect, the SABC now outsources nearly all of its programming; the efficacy of the principles underlying outsourcing need to be reconsidered. The 50% that is commissioned should also be subject to a condition requiring provincial diversity in commissioning.

Another constraining factor on the capability of the sector to achieve diverse programming is the fact that only a handful of the existing production groups produce most programming. This problem has been attributed to the increase in production costs in the industry, reflecting the international trends, have also fuelled increasing consolidation in the industry, as only the larger groups have been able to achieve the economies of scale necessary to secure large contracts.^[1] The argument that broadcasters save money by outsourcing programming is an assumption that has yet to be proved scientifically.

Over and above these problems, there is also an increasing awareness internationally that outsourcing programming does not necessarily yield the intended benefits. The publisher-broadcaster model has been criticised in other countries for leading to a fragmentation of the public mandate, an inflationary rise in the cost of productions (and hence of broadcasting) as new cost centres are introduced, and a convergence of public and private production styles leading to public programming being indistinguishable from the private variety. Broadcasters also lose control over programming - no matter how tight the commissioning briefs are - leading to a loss of editorial independence. Marginalisation of public broadcasting becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as rising costs coupled with declining quality and commercialisation of programme formats make it even more difficult to justify funding from the public purse: after all what is the point in providing public subsidy for a broadcaster that simply broadcasts 'more of the same'.

In the light of these weaknesses of the publisher-broadcaster approach, other public broadcasters that have gone this route, such as the BBC, are re-establishing in-house production capacity and are gradually becoming programme producers once again. Given South Africa's economic and demographic realities, especially in provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, we believe that it is appropriate that the SABC be made to re-establish in-house production capacity as part of the restructuring process. This could be done through the establishment of programming hubs in different parts of the country: not a centralised super-hub that merely locates commissioning in one point. In this regard, the SABC's understanding of the content hub concept is impoverished. While these hubs would produce programming themselves, they would also commission, which in turn would require a decentralisation of the commissioning procedures, which according to our knowledge is not provided for in the current plans.

4.5 Designation of PBS channels and PCBS channels

No argument is made about why certain channels are considered PBS and certain others are PCBS. If it is determined in terms of profitability, then SABC 1 is much more profitable than SABC 3. There are also indications that Ukhozi is possibly the most profitable station. Interestingly, Ukhozi was found out during our study to be one of the few stations within the SABC that attempt to strike a balance between higher earning and lower (even unemployed) listeners. The designation of certain channels and stations as PCBS should not be taken for granted, and should be interrogated further. Profit and loss statements should be provided for each service. It would appear that the SABC has designated loss-making services as the PCBS services precisely because it knew that they could never cross-subsidise the PBS channels, and they therefore rendered the Broadcasting Act still-borne. In fact, as we have already stated, the claim that PCBS cross-subsidises PBS is yet to be proven. It might be that this has started to be factored in. If so, there has not been a public pronouncement on this that is supported by evidence.

4.6 Universal access

In terms of the editorial policy, the Board requires management to submit an annual action plan for broadcasting universal service and access, outlining the goals and resources required. The Board will then consider the extent to which the annual

targets have been met, and the relevant information will be included in a report to Parliament.

However, coverage targets should be included as part of the licence conditions, to ensure external monitoring and effective mechanisms of redress in the case of targets not being met. As the SABC has pointed out, one of the principles guiding this policy is that achieving universal access and service is the responsibility of the South African broadcasting system as a whole, and that it should be shared between the SABC and other broadcasters.

4.7 The licence conditions

As has been argued in the previous section, there is nothing in law stopping Icasa from particularizing the requirements of the Broadcasting Act in law: on the contrary, the Authority has an obligation to do so. Having cleared this matter out of the way, we submit that the licence conditions should be particularized on a manner such that they compel the broadcaster to ensure that no listeners, particularly the working class listeners, are 'crowded out' of its spectrum.

In order to achieve that above the licensing conditions for the SABC should be developed to capture the following principles:

- 4.7.1 The broadcaster should be prevented from being an exclusive medium for middle and upper classes. It should cater for all classes, and if we may say, be biased positively towards the poorer sections of our society.
- 4.7.2 The public broadcaster should ensure that there are attempts to promote the growth of African languages. The skewed history of the country, which gave rise to African languages being marginalised as mediums of communication needs to be addressed by, among many other players, the public broadcaster.
- 4.7.3 The SABC should nurture and promote local content. This refers mostly to the entertainment function of the broadcaster. There have been some promising interventions on the side of ICASA to ensure that broadcasters get specific guidelines on how to achieve this goal. What is still to be seen is how the broadcaster adheres to the regulator's specifications and requirements.
- 4.7.4 For listeners the SABC is still seen as not doing enough to promote local content. There are of course instances where listeners feel that there are attempts to fulfill the mandate of nurturing and promoting local content. This has to do mainly with airplay for local music. The same cannot be said about the promotion of drama. The challenge facing the SABC is to start re-investing in drama and other forms of entertainment that can be seen to be promoting local talent. This is an investment that the broadcaster has to make without allowing pressures of the genre becoming one of the income generation sources. For more on Local content, see below.
- 4.7.5 The licencing conditions need to set a minimum percentage of spending on programming, especially local content programming. Without this target, the SABC runs the risk of perpetuating its tendency to overspend on bureaucracy at the expense of what should be is core business, namely programming. The risks of overspend on bureaucracy are heightened by the reorganisation, which will create an even longer paper trail, given the complexity of the administrative and financial systems that will be needed to administer the separation between PBS and PCBS.

4.7.6 As part of the 50% outsourcing requirement, the regulator requires a percentage of this percentage to involve the commissioning of community television initiatives.

As mentioned in the introduction, time does not permit us to make more specific recommendations. We therefore request an oral hearing to address the particulars of these general recommendations.

5. Financial information

As mentioned in the introduction, the SABC's publicly released financial information is shocking in its scantiness, and the FXI intends to put in an information request in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act to address the huge information deficits ahead of the oral hearings.

A small indication of the problem created by this information deficit. The assertion in the SABC's application that it has spent R1 billion on the local production industry is nothing to write home about. It amounts to 11.5% of the SABC's total budget over this period.

According to the SABC's latest annual report, just over R1.6 billion of the total budget of R2.5 billion is spent on television: approximately two-thirds of the budget. So if approx 66% of the SABC's total annual budget is spent on television, and 11.5% (assuming expenditure remained constant on local production over the four years) of the total budget is spent on local productions, where is the remaining 54.5% of the remaining television budget going?

The SABC should give us information about the exact amount of money spent on programming, relative to other functions. This should be further broken down to reflect spending on local vs. foreign programming (stripping out news). This should then be expressed as a percentage over time. Only once we start receiving such financial information from the SABC can we start to evaluate arguments about affordability sensibly.

The SABC should also make available detailed information about the amount of money it has been spending on programming over a ten year period, and breakdowns of amounts spent on programming relative to 'other' costs such as operational costs (the information we requested): information we have requested before. In the absence of this information, it would be very dangerous for ICASA to take the SABC's affordability argument at face value. The SABC should publish all beneficiaries of independent production budgets, and the budget amounts allocated to these companies.

More specifically the finances are incomplete without the following information:

- Hours of television programming produced in-house per performance period per channel.
- Hours of television programming originated
- Hours of television programming repeated
- Costs per hour of input for television programming
- Costs of output per member of staff for radio and television
- Costs per hour per listener and viewer
- Profit and loss statements for each service
- Profit and loss statements for news, education and sport.

6. Addendum 1

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON SABC PUBLIC SERVICE RADIO

In 2001, the FXI embarked on a two-year project focusing on the South African Broadcasting Corporation, consisting of two stages. The first stage, undertaken in 2001, involved an assessment of the SABC from the perspective of employees, management, the regulator, the Department of Communications and the Portfolio Committee on Communications. The second stage, undertaken in 2002, involved qualitative audience research on the extent to which public radio was meeting its mandate. More specifically the research intended to:

- Encourage listeners to express their views on SABC services in one forum (which will make the audience research process much easier).
- Create a forum for audiences to interact with SABC stations directly.
- Inform listeners about the contents of the Broadcasting Charter if they are not aware of its contents, and facilitating discussion about whether the Charter is sufficiently reflective of the SABC's public obligations
- Encourage the organisation of listeners to speak back to the SABC about the nature and quality of its services.

The project had to negotiate a number of hurdles. Firstly, at the initial stages of the project the FXI had intended to collaborate with the Cape Town based Media Training Centre. However, negotiations between the Unit and the MTC failed because of clear differences of approach. The second problem was securing interviews with SABC management. It was only towards the tail end of the project that we secured an interview with Dr Ihron Rensburg, the managing director for SABC Education and public and regulatory affairs. The same problem was faced with regard to an interview with the DoC. It was only towards the tail end of the study that we managed to have an interview with the Senior General Manager: Broadcasting, Mr Joe Mjwara.

Despite all these problems the process was able to yield very valuable data which resulted in a book, *Public broadcasting in the era of cost recovery: A critique of the SABC's crisis of accountability*. What follows below is a summary of the research as contained in the book.

It should be noted that most of the research findings relate to public service radio, some observations about the state of television have also been included.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS OF RESEARCH, AND CHARACTERISATION OF PARTICIPANTS

A standard, semi-structured interview schedule was developed and used to guide all interviews and focus group sessions. The interview schedules were framed around the research questions outlined in the introduction. This was done so that a sense of uniformity could emerge out of the interviews. The semi-structured nature of the schedule also allowed for manageable flexibility for the inclusion of information that might have been overlooked when formulating the schedule.

Interviews and focus group sessions were conducted with a range of individuals and groups. Within the SABC, interviews were conducted with members of the Media Workers' Association of South Africa (Mwasa), and other workers and managers who were not affiliated to the union. Mwasa endorsed the participation of its members and the entire study in broad terms. However, that did not necessarily imply that the union endorses the findings of the research.

A decision was taken at the beginning of the study and at each session that the identities of individual SABC workers and a few managers who participated in the study would be protected under the general ethical obligations binding the researcher if so requested by the respondents in a social science research project.

Interviews and focus group sessions were also held with a number of groups from what has come to be popularly known as civil society. These are groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are involved in a variety of projects. The opinions of these groups were solicited primarily because of their active engagement in social change activities.

A number of areas were visited for either public meetings or focus group interviews. These were Cape Town, Durban, Polokwane, Johannesburg, Umtata, Hazyview and Rustenburg. Recorded tapes (from phone-in programmes) were received from The Voice Community Radio and Unitra Community Radio.

The Cape Town focus group comprised people from the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC), the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu), Youth for Work, the South African Commercial and Catering Workers' Union (Saccawu), Workers World Radio Productions, Earthlife Africa and Labour Research Services. In a large measure, this was a group that comprised mainly activists who have a keen interest in political and socio-economic issues.

The AEC is a social movement that aims to oppose what it perceives as evictions of poor people from houses as a result of the neo-liberal ideology of the government that finds expression through the actions of different municipalities. It is based in Cape Town. It has links with such groups as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) that is mainly Johannesburg-based but is currently expanding to other areas throughout the country.

Samwu can be said to be one of the most vociferous unions within the Cosatu fold. It has maintained a principled standpoint against the privatisation of municipal services. Samwu participants at the focus group meetings reflected this political standpoint, being opposed to all forms of privatisation, including that of the SABC, which they maintain should remain a public institution, that will be in a better position to serve the public if it remained in public hands.

Youth for Work, as the name suggests, is made up of young people who are concerned about employment issues not only for young people but also for all employable people within the country. Politically, it can be said that the group adopts a left perspective on political and socio-economic issues.

Saccawu is one of the affiliates of Cosatu. While not as vocal as Samwu on issues of privatisation, purely because it operates wholly within the private sector, Saccawu

is known for its ability to embark on radical action at times. However, as said above, its standpoint or ability to address itself to issues of public versus private/commercial interests is not as strong as other groups that attended the meeting. Hence, not surprisingly, Saccawu participants at the meeting were much more concerned with the coverage that the union movement receives.

Workers World Radio Productions (WWRP) is an independent, alternative production house that focuses solely on producing programmes that are biased favourably towards the working class. It has formed partnerships with the labour movement and the National Community Media Forum. At the time of completing this book, programmes were broadcast on community radio stations. The WWRP is linked to the Labour Research Services (LRS), an NGO that focuses on labour research that is aimed at supporting the trade union movement. In fact, the LRS acts as the main supporting think-tank for the WWRP. Politically, the two organisations, or projects, adopt a left-leaning understanding of political and socio-economic issues. They, therefore, always adopt a working-class perspective on public broadcasting and how the SABC is carrying out its mandate.

Earthlife Africa is an environmental organisation that "... seek(s) to understand the complex and interdependent relations between human beings and the environment". Like many environmental organisations, it has a political outlook on the environment, emphasising social justice issues. Interestingly, its participants did not confine themselves only to environmental issues during the discussions. They were able to give informed comments on issues affecting public broadcasting.

In Durban the meeting was attended mainly by members of the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF). There were also a number of unaffiliated, yet politically active individuals who attended the meeting. The CCF is almost like Cape Town's AEC or Johannesburg's APF. It is a social movement that has moulded itself around campaigns to challenge the neo-liberal policies of the government. One of the CCF's most outstanding political achievements is that it has succeeded where many organisations have failed by building solidarity among working class communities across ethnic divides. KwaZulu-Natal is known to have some disturbing ethnic divisions, particularly between African and Indian people. What the CCF has achieved is to build solidarity between these communities by demonstrating to them how they have shared interests.

The Polokwane meeting was attended by members of the following organisations: Institute of Farmworkers Research and Development (IFRD); Jubilee 2000; Timbila Cultural Group; National Council of African Women (NCAW); Catholic Church Youth; and Awake Africa Training and Development.

The IFRD focuses mainly on rural people by offering research and development planning that is aimed at improving the quality of life of rural inhabitants. As such, its members were able to bring in the valuable angle of how rural people interface with the media, from the vantage point of their lifestyles and needs.

Jubilee 2000 is a national organisation that was formed with the aim of fighting for social justice. One of the primary campaigns of the organisation is to fight for the cancellation of the debt incurred by the apartheid regime that is being paid for by the post-apartheid government. The organisation argues that this is an odious debt and

the current government is not at all, either politically or morally, to honour the debt. Instead, it argues, the money being paid into the debt must be used to increase social spending. Politically, Jubilee 2000 is an amalgam of different political persuasions, from some left-leaning intellectuals through to social democrats and faith-based moralists.

Timbila Cultural Group and Catholic Church Youth cater for young people who are involved in performing arts and church activities respectively. Political opinion within these groups differs from individual to individual. This can range from left-leaning persuasions through to social democratic tendencies that are influenced by moral views of the church. The aggregate opinion from the two organisations seems to be that of secular humanism. Thus, concerns about public broadcasting are how it "benefits people". The NCAW and Awake Africa Training and Development seem to be taking developmentalist, self-help approaches to issues of socio-economic development.

The Hazyview meeting was attended by individuals from different political persuasions. There were members of the ANC. There were also a number of trade union members from Simunye Workers' Union, which is affiliated to the Federation of Unions of South Africa (Fedusa). Views in that meeting ranged from the less informed through to the highly informed. Most of the participants seemed to be more concerned with regional issues.

The meeting in Rustenburg was attended almost exclusively by Cosatu-affiliated unions. Most of the participants, taking a cue obviously from Cosatu's campaign against the SABC, were centred around the broadcaster's failure to positively broadcast news about the labour movement by always "taking sides" with business owners, and the government in the case of public sector unions.

Lastly, the public meeting in Johannesburg was attended by members of the APF and a number of media unions, particularly the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa). There were also a number of cultural activists and individuals who have a keen interest in media issues. As in the case of the AEC in Cape Town and the CCF in Durban, the APF is one of the social movements that are opposed to the neo-liberal policies of the government. The characterisation of the AEC and CCF above applies in the case of the APF.

Mwasa is the biggest media workers union in the country. It has had a critical role in shaping the understanding of how public broadcasting should be understood in the country. As a key union at the SABC, Mwasa remains critical of all the developments that continue to arise within the broadcaster as it is always called to demonstrate leadership on a number of policy issues.

Some interesting views emerged also from other participants who took part in the Johannesburg meeting. For instance, it was fascinating to listen to the views expressed by those involved in cultural activities. Their views were outstanding in the sense that, perhaps like those who are members of Mwasa, they have a direct interest in media (and broadly cultural) issues.

The sum total of the views offered by participants at the meetings, which range from humanist to left-leaning, even Marxist, orientations, offer a rich and diverse spectrum

of how public broadcasting is viewed in the country. The meetings knitted together a diversity of opinion which produced a powerful, yet disturbing, tapestry of thought that presents a deep concern for the direction taken by the SABC.

OVERVIEW OF MAIN FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

- **Commercialisation of stations**

Firstly, PBS stations are being forced to pursue commercial interests. This is due to the fact that while the broad understanding is that these stations should be cross-subsidised by PCBS stations, they are also expected to meet certain revenue targets. The logical consequence of this is that stations find themselves having to reposition their programmes and programme content in such a way that they reflect the needs and interests of the upwardly mobile sections of the society.

Thobela fm effected programme changes with this in mind. The station changed its programmes after "market research" indicated that it would benefit much more if the nature and content of programming was skewed to suit the interests of urban, upwardly mobile listeners rather than the rural, illiterate, and poor listeners who happened to be the traditional and loyal listeners of the station. The station sought to attract "quality listenership", meaning those who are viewed by market researchers as having "buying power".

At Umhlobo Wenene fm, a programming conference that was held at the end of 2000 decided to categorise listeners into two main categories, Primary 1 and Primary 2. Primary 1 listeners are urban, upward-moving listeners who fall into the 16 to 38 age category. Primary 2 listeners are mainly rural or non-educated, less mobile listeners who are 39 years and older. The station avoids saying that the Primary 1 listeners are secondary. They are considered to be equally important. What distinguishes these two categories is that the Primary 1 listeners are seen as a strategic group that is able to attract advertisers and sponsors.

Considerations to generate more revenue have in the case of Umhlobo Wenene fm led to the dropping of an adult programme that was called 12 Down. This was after the station's commissioned research study indicated that the programme had minimal chances of attracting more revenue.

- **Commercial imperatives have forced a bias towards the 'educated class'**

The major concern expressed by those who listen to public radio services is that they seem to have shifted from being a medium that serves the interests of all people, irrespective of class, to one serving the interests of the middle classes. An observation was made about how some of the current affairs programmes are handled. Thobela fm was singled out both at the Mpumalanga (Hazyview) and Limpopo (Polokwane) focus group meetings. A participant at the Mpumalanga meeting, one of those who can be said to be well-informed, had this to say:

'We do commend what Thobela fm tries to do. Indeed their current affairs programmes have improved in terms of quality. They also try very hard to bring news that is national in content, while trying to contextualise it for people who live within the broadcast area of the station.'

However, I have noted a rather disturbing trend with a programme called Tlhokwalatsela. This is a current affairs programme. Often the presenter engages his guests and listeners in English. Of course this is sometimes unavoidable because some of the guests do not speak Sepedi or any of the Sotho languages. However, I think in that case the presenter should always try to translate what was discussed, just in summary, for those who might not understand. And there are many such people given the high illiteracy rate in the Limpopo province.

Again, besides the language used, another problem is the content. Many will agree with me that that programme is not meant for "ordinary people". The content is so high-flown that one wonders if it is for all people or only for the educated. I think it is only for the educated and not for all people'.

An almost similar observation was made at the Limpopo meeting where it was noted that programming is segmented. The morning shows, from 6am till 9am are often "tailored for the educated, leaving the non-educated behind". A similar observation was made about the afternoon drive shows (from 3pm till 6pm). A cynical participant, who also claimed to be a former freelance presenter at Thobela fm, made this interesting observation:

'During those times the poor have no radio. Radio becomes the preserve and melting pot of ideas for the educated'.

The comments of the former freelancer must be taken with caution. It is possible that while these comments were made with a genuine concern for the state of public radio, he might be harbouring great anger towards the station. However, because such a suspicion is difficult to prove, such comments should not be disregarded, just like any other comments made by other respondents.

- **Commercial imperatives have forced an urban bias on stations**

Another factor that affects the station's repositioning is that it is the only station that broadcasts in all the major metropolises (Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, East London, Bloemfontein, and Pretoria). This has affected the manner in which the station "packages" and "brands" itself. There is a slight skew towards a more urban, upward listenership, the Primary 1 listeners. In order to achieve better revenue returns the station sought to target higher LSM categories. As an interviewee at the station put it:

'That is where money is. Lower LSM listeners do not bring us business'.

In some cases stations do not change programming as such, but reduce the time allocated to programmes that are viewed as not attracting advertisements and sponsorships. These are usually programmes that are aimed at the rural and elderly listeners. The trend is to cut programmes to about 15 minutes.

The shift towards being stations that are also concerned with generating revenue has not only raised questions around the very nature of PBS but also how these stations can still be said to be reaching out to a broader audience and serving that audience equally. The shift also raises the question of the stations' own identities.

A critical question was posed by one producer on the issue of stations having to meet certain revenue targets. The producer observed that the implication of a station being expected to meet certain revenue targets implies that a station should have a target audience. That simply means the station having to dump a portion of their listeners who are considered not to be strategic enough in the station's attempt to attract advertisers and sponsors. What then would be the meaning of public service? Who will be the public? What this means is that the station will have to scale down its public obligation. However, the dilemma that stations find themselves in has to be addressed. Faced with decreasing budget allocations (in real terms), stations find themselves in a position where they are forced to consider aggressive revenue-generating plans. One interviewee summed up this dilemma rather well:

'We are not in the business of making or not making money. But if we do not make money how are we going to survive? Yet if we compel ourselves to become moneymakers how are we going to serve our people? It is a Catch 22 situation. Our financial allocation is not enough to keep the station running, we simply have our heads above the water. Hence we are compelled to generate revenue, and in the process of doing that we find ourselves losing our identity'.

One presenter argued that most of the programmes in PBS stations are no longer aimed at all people.

'Do you think that an old illiterate women in the rural areas understands the language that is spoken in the radio today, and the issues that are discussed?'

This presents many stations with a dilemma, what we can call a crisis of identity.

A quick glance through a number of regional stations' websites, underdeveloped as they currently are, reveals a conscious move towards urbanising these stations. Yet the vast areas that the stations serve are mainly rural. The question that arises is: who is being served by these stations? What is striking is that most of the stations have set themselves on a course to serve an urbanised audience. The most striking example is that of Motsweding fm whose website states:

'Motsweding is a full service broadcasting in Setswana with significant entertainment bias geared towards satisfying the needs of the relatively sophisticated urbanised listenership.⁹⁸ Thobela fm states that it is a "youth-oriented radio ... (which) offers a diverse schedule of drama serials, music and news"'.

The wisdom of positioning stations like this needs to be questioned because a larger portion of the geographic areas over which the stations broadcast is rural. Only a small percentage of the area is urban. What we should question is not whether these stations must also aim to serve urban audiences who happen to be young. Our argument is that these stations should aim to strike a balance between such audiences and all other "pockets" of audiences, whether they are old, rural or disabled.

What emerged out of this trend is that stations are not only trying to target higher LSM listeners, they also find themselves developing a crisis in their "presenting

style". The Motsweding fm focus group admitted that they see their station as competing against Metro fm. In practical terms this means that the station sheds all that is unique about the language and culture of those it was initially aimed at targeting as an audience. One presenter pointed out that a particularly popular programme, Moribo wa Africa (The Rhythm of Africa), judging by its popularity, deserves at least two hours of airtime. Yet the programme cannot be allocated more than an hour of airtime purely because it does not attract adequate advertising revenue. A few years ago the presenter of the programme was changed, only to be brought back because of public pressure.

These concerns were echoed by the audience focus groups, specifically at the Umtata meeting and during a phone-in programme conducted by Unitra Community Radio. A participant at the Umtata meeting, in his early thirties, who claimed he did not have a good education, said that Umhlobo Wenene fm was now using a lot of English in its programmes, especially the breakfast shows. He said:

'They now use a lot of English, as if they are broadcasting to the educated people. It is as if they are only interested in (the cosmopolitan cities - emphasis added) cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town, where the elite live'.

This observation seems to correlate, or is validated by, the admission made by an interviewee at Umhlobo Wenene fm, who said because it is the only station that reaches all metropolitan towns in the country the station has to be relevant to all its listeners and not only to Eastern and Western Cape listeners. Whereas the position taken by the by the FXI is one that agrees with the sentiments expressed by some of the respondents at Motsweding fm - that African language stations must not be regionalised - we also agree with those who argue that stations must strive to serve their primary audiences and not sacrifice such audiences in their attempts to reach wider audiences. The following observation made by another participant at the Umtata meeting demonstrates this view:

'In the first place we need to ask ourselves who the primary audience for Umhlobo Wenene is. Let's face facts, whereas the station does broadcast to other areas, we cannot run away from the fact that many of its listeners come from the Eastern Cape. Let's take (the former) Transkei. This is a rural area. Yet the station does not bother to cater for rural audiences. Its programmes do not cater for the needs of rural people. For instance, because they do not have telephones, many rural people rely on radio for bereavement announcements. Umhlobo Wenene does not do this correctly. They give this issue secondary consideration. Other stations are able to broadcast in a much better way to rural people. But, you see, some of them do not have the same radius as Umhlobo Wenene does. For instance, UCR (Unitra Community Radio) is very good; but how many people are able to receive it? Very few. The onus is on Umhlobo Wenene to improve its services'.

As a result of the above, African language audiences find themselves being alienated from these stations. In the final analysis, instead of expanding, the means of communication for the poor continues to shrink. This perpetuates the divide that many analysts of modern day communication systems maintain exists. Whereas the rich and elite elements within the society continue to become enriched in terms of information because their relative wealth enables them to gain access to

information, the working class continues to be let down and "crowded out" of the information loop.

- **Commercial imperatives have forced a Gauteng-bias on stations**

A careful deconstruction of the concerns raised by Limpopo and Mpumalanga participants reveals that, in fact, the problem is not multilingualism as such. Rather, there is a strong regional trapping in which many find themselves. There is a disturbing feeling among those who live outside Gauteng that media, particularly television and radio, is dominated by people who live in Gauteng. It is difficult to ascertain the plausibility of this claim. What can instead be advanced as an explanation for this unfortunate development is that often when negative consequences of economic regression, such as unemployment, become more pronounced, people retreat into tribal enclaves, a trend that some analysts call the re-tribalisation of post-apartheid South Africa.

Yet, a point that cannot be brushed aside is the concern raised by participants at the Mpumalanga meeting. They argued that the station that is supposed to serve that part of the country, Ligwalagwala fm, has an urban bias, with a heavy Gauteng influence in terms of content and style. Of course, it was difficult to get participants to say exactly what they meant by style. What did come out, however, is that rural listeners and people living in Mpumalanga feel left out. The station tends to focus much more on Gauteng listeners. There was also a claim that even news and current affairs, while still maintaining a regional focus, sometimes tend to be biased towards Gauteng listeners.

News on Ligwalagwala fm was cited by participants at the Mpumalanga meeting as an example of how the station has a Gauteng bias. One participant argued that the station used news material derived either from the SABC's main newsfeed or from the South African Press Association (Sapa), which is seen as being a Gauteng-based news agency more than a national one. Obviously, some of these claims are contestable. It is, however, the approach adopted in this book to present views as they were presented by the viewers and listeners as a measure of their attitudes and feelings towards the broadcaster's services.

In the absence of any explanation for the practice mentioned above, if it can be found to be true, we can only speculate why there are such practices. Firstly, there seems to be an unpronounced effort on the part of many stations to compete for the "Gauteng market". This could be because Gauteng is still seen by many as the hub of economic activity and its residents (viewers and listeners) remain the target for all media houses, despite the fact that other provinces have their own diverse economic activities and potentials. At the centre of this is the failure to form new targets and develop new visions for the stations.

The second explanation that might be advanced for this perceived tendency can be the fact that, rightly or wrongly, Gauteng is still seen as the "cultural capital of the country". Because many media houses and related industries, such as music, theatre, poetry etc., are situated in the province, Gauteng establishments tend to dominate the media to the extent that media houses outside the province tend to model themselves around Gauteng's "developed culture".

- **Commercialisation has led to bias towards English**

As admitted by the Motsweding fm presenters and producers, there seems to be a trend within many stations by presenters to switch to English.

The tendency by some of the African language stations to shift their focus was admitted by the managing director for education and public and regulatory affairs at the SABC, Dr Ihron Rensburg. He added that it was true that some of the stations were increasingly sounding like Metro fm rather than African-language stations. The primary reason for this shift, according to Rensburg, was that, because of shrinking, almost non-existent public funding, the public broadcaster was forced to "stabilise" its operations. The practical consequence of the stabilisation exercise was to "force" stations to generate revenue, which meant that stations had to target higher LSM listeners in order to attract advertisers and listeners.

It appears that many listeners have serious concerns about the increasing usage of English by some of the presenters in many African-language stations. Those from "within" (presenters, producers and a few managers) also share this sentiment. Participants at Ukhozi fm talked about the anglicisation of African-language stations. Those at Motsweding fm related how as a station they see themselves only competing with Metro fm and not with any other African-language station.

As already indicated in the above section an issue that is related to class and commercial pressures is language. Overall, except in a few occasions and examples such as Tlhokwalatsela fm and Umhlobo Wenene fm, many listeners are satisfied that public radio is accessible in their own languages. Besides a disturbing tendency to increasingly use English, what is commendable is the growing multilingual trends that are often observed in a number of stations. It is not rare these days to hear listeners phoning in and speaking in languages other than that used by the station. For example, often Motsweding fm receives calls from people who speak isiZulu. Most of the presenters are able to understand these languages, with some even able to communicate in them. Although there were some concerns in Mpumalanga and Limpopo about this development, participants at the Gauteng meeting felt that cultural and language purism must be challenged and discouraged. An argument supporting this view is that language and cultural purism goes against the grain of nation building which can be achieved through, among other methods, the promotion of multilingualism.

It is not difficult to understand why listeners from Gauteng would be more receptive to multilingualism given that, over the years, Gauteng has come to represent a South African ideal - a place where many people appreciate, are open to and even speak several languages. Other areas can be said to still be under the heavy legacy of apartheid, where language and cultural purism was entrenched. It will definitely take time before this legacy is undone. In fact, this is one of the bigger challenges that the SABC needs to meet - ensuring that it becomes a medium through which South Africans are able to break and cross language barriers.

As a public broadcaster, the SABC will have to face the challenge of ensuring that it plays a role in assisting South Africans to realise one of the positive attributes of the national Constitution, which is the recognition of all African languages as official languages that everyone has the right to use for communication. But, is the SABC

achieving this, or at least attempting to realise this? And what about the claim by some listeners that the practice of encouraging multilingualism can destroy the preservation of certain languages?

What came out very strongly in all the meetings was the use of English in television. Many participants felt that English is more privileged than other African languages. Singled out for serious concern are children's programmes such as Takalane Sesame and Yo-TV. While the main problem with Takalane Sesame is that it is broadcast mainly in English even though its contents are quite educative, is viewed as being a misrepresentation of children's experiences. Most participants felt that Yo-TV presenters are mainly middle class and have disturbing American mannerisms. Also, some parents who attended the Johannesburg and Durban meetings felt that Yo-TV creates false hopes in children and often place parents under pressure because their children demand things that are shown on Yo-TV. It must be said that these strong views against perceived middle-class trappings can be attributed to the fact that both the Durban and Johannesburg meetings were attended by activists from social movements such as the Community Consultative Forum (CCF) and the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF).

Another serious problem that arises from concerns about language purism has to do with how the SABC treats certain languages. While the South African Constitution recognises all African languages as official languages, with the exception of the Khoi and San languages, there has been unequal treatment of these languages. The xiTsonga and Tshivenda languages continue to be marginalised on SABC television. Nine years into the new democratic dispensation there is still no news and current affairs programmes on television for those two languages. It is only in the drama department that we have seen the broadcasting of a Tshivenda drama series, Muvhango - which is, interestingly, one of the most popular television programmes.

It can be argued that the seeming resistance towards multilingualism expressed by radio listeners at the meetings held in Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces stems from the marginalisation of their languages, notably Tshivenda, XiTsonga and even IsiSwati and Sindebele, by television stations. Would it be wrong to speculate that there must be a feeling of "You do not allow us onto television and yet even our radio is infiltrated by other languages". Of course, many progressive people would view such a statement as reactionary. However, before we raise our politically correct voices we have to appreciate the sense of deprivation speakers of certain languages feel when they see their languages being marginalised. This, together with the pressing economic conditions already referred to, could prove to be a recipe for a disastrous retribalisation.

The meetings noted that, on television, important current affairs programmes such as Special Assignment are only broadcast in English. A clear suggestion was that an attempt should be made to make this available in other African languages. As a start, subtitles in African languages should be considered. Another innovative idea would be to translate these programmes into audio material that could be aired on the radio, as radio is much more widely available than television. This would be an interim measure, and these translations must not be allowed to supplant radio-specific material

- **Commercial imperatives have led to the marginalisation of (mainly older) women**

It can be argued that the observation made by the Limpopo listener (respondent) that older women listen to the radio at midday, is a reflection of the current attitude and "packaging" of radio programming. In terms of current "radio-speak", midday slots come second after midnight slots in terms of their relative "lack of importance". This is presumably because of the fact that most of the higher LSM listeners are at work and, therefore, the ratings for these listeners are low at that time. Most of the people who listen to radio at that time are either older people or the unemployed, clearly not a useful category for advertisers and the stations which would like to attract these advertisers.

A former media student activist made an interesting observation about current programming patterns. He noted a particular segmentation of radio programming, which, he argued, was almost similar across stations, with slight variations here and there. Note the depth of observation peppered with a humorous, almost sarcastic analysis:

'The period from 6am till 9am is the morning show where the educated enjoy themselves. Then from 9am till 12pm are women's programmes, specifically housewives. This is when they sell microwaves and Hoovers. One wonders who told them to sell these gadgets at that times, and why these gadgets only. Why not screwdrivers and all that? Then from 12pm till 3pm the madness starts with fast music. Then from 3pm the drive show starts and the music becomes faster. This is when they start telling us about bombs and all that. At 6pm they go back to the educated till 9pm. (Summarised).'

The above observation offers not only a refreshing observation but quite a deep analysis. A careful reading of this observation reveals three main elements. Firstly, radio programming has got serious class trappings. If the categorisation as observed above is the norm then it stands to reason that the non-educated, who are often women and rural people, are gradually being excluded from radio. Secondly, and closely related to that is the issue of gender stereotyping. The assumption, which of course is true, is that most women are at home after the breakfast show. While this is the case, such an assumption fails to also acknowledge that with high unemployment figures there are also a lot of men at home. But more seriously it means that programming perpetuates the domestication of women. It perpetuates patriarchy in the society instead of challenging it. Indeed, it might have to be asked again, "Why not (also sell) screwdrivers at that time)?"

A participant at the Limpopo meeting observed that coming originally from Venda and now living in a rural area just outside Mahwelereng, she has observed that old women only listen to radio at around midday. This is the only time when they can identify with programming and content. Otherwise, the other times are reserved for a more urbanised and educated audience, which could explain the trend observed in the last SAARF123 figures that indicate that public radio has lost women listeners and those who reside in the rural areas. Again, this confirms the observations made by the SABC workers interviewed that many stations, as a result of pressure from the broadcaster's management to meet certain revenue targets, have had to change

their target audiences so that they can at least compete for the very thin layer of the urban middle class.

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- **Commercial imperatives have led to changes to formats of stations and dropping of programmes**

Another example of how programmes that are important for identity formation of listeners are being sacrificed because of pressures to generate revenue is the African traditional religious programme at Thobela fm. The programme has had to be reduced to 15 minutes because adequate revenue could not be generated by the station through the programme.

Metro FM and 5FM have endeavoured to move some of their "best DJs" to the morning and afternoon shows, while retaining "less popular DJs" for the midday shows. The same seems to be happening with many other African language stations, except for Motsweding fm, which has, interestingly, always managed to retain some of its best presenters for the midday slots even though the station itself can be said to be one of the worst affected in terms of trying to emulate commercial stations like Metro fm.

Drama was also singled out as an art form that is not receiving support from the SABC. A participant at the Umtata meeting argued that there were repeats of old dramas instead of new dramas. In response, Ihron Rensburg conceded that there were very few, if any, new dramas being broadcast. He promised, however, that this would be rectified shortly. He said that radio was going to see more vibrant and hard-hitting drama, similar to the new trend in television drama, such as Yizo Yizo and Gaz'lam. He argued further that as was the case with the repeat broadcast of Yizo Yizo 2, which did not receive sponsorship or advertising support, new radio drama will not be dictated to by the availability of financial support, but by the need for such "vibrant" drama.

- **Insufficient promotion of South African talent, especially in relation to music**

Another major theme discussed during the meetings was whether the broadcaster promotes South African talent. The charter of the SABC as contained in the Broadcast Act, No 4 of 1999 stipulates that the broadcaster should:

'urture South African talent and train people in production skills and carry out research and development for the benefit of audiences'

The importance of this assertion cannot be overstated. As the evidence presented below demonstrates, existing perceptions within some sections of the community view the broadcaster as having failed to nurture South African talent and offer training to people so they can acquire production skills.

A number of participants felt that, in terms of music, the SABC has a heavy leaning towards American pop and rhythm and blues music to the disadvantage of local music. Obviously, this is a matter that might be addressed by Icasa's local content policy. The policy stipulates that local music - as defined by Icasa - must be prominent in all the stations, particularly for the public broadcaster. The discussion and submissions that were made during the process of producing the policy paper touched on the need to exempt stations that target certain categories of music that might prove to be difficult to source in South Africa. The FXI and NCRF argued in their submission that exemptions should only be given to such exceptional cases as Chinese Community Radio. The argument by the SABC that a station like Lotus fm be exempted was challenged by a Durban-based group called the Interim Task Team - representing local Indian musicians - on the basis that there are a number of artists who reside in South Africa and who compose, produce and perform what can be termed "traditional Indian music".

The final decision made by Icasa favoured an increase in the proportions of South African music to be aired by different broadcasters.

Icasa will review the quotas and how broadcasters are adhering to them in 2007, a period that might prove to be too long to seriously ensure adherence. Ideally, reviews should be held every year. The process of holding yearly reviews could be undertaken quite simply and cheaply, if costs were a consideration on the part of Icasa. As is the current practice, stations could be asked to compile yearly figures showing how they adhere to the required quotas. The regulator could then choose to verify these figures at the end of every two years. A more comprehensive review could be held at the end of the stipulated five-year period.

Whereas it can be argued that the licensing conditions laid down by the regulator for each broadcast licensee are sufficient to enable the regulator to make the necessary interventions in cases where stations are failing to fulfil the conditions, it must, on the other hand, be said that it would be more helpful and advisable for the regulator to demonstrate to the broadcaster and the nation that it is taking the matter of local content seriously by developing a specific and deliberate focus to ensure that stations are always kept on their toes in this matter.

The issue of local content remains emotive. Whereas there are those who argue that quotas must be prescribed in order to ensure that broadcasters reflect and promote a distinctive South African taste in terms of music, there are also those who believe that broadcasters must be allowed to broadcast any type of music that their listeners like, leaving the development of local music to the vagaries of the free market. Some of these divisions emerged during the meetings.

Younger viewers and listeners felt that there was nothing wrong with having the dominance of American music because "we like it". On the other hand, older viewers and listeners felt that there was a need for more South African music. The Cape Town group argued that, again, local content, was determined by the dominance of

the market. An AEC activist argued that the SABC has a tendency to take in all the "failed American products" and parade them as the standard against which South African musicians should measure themselves.

Another concern with regard to local talent is that the broadcaster is seen as only promoting one genre of South African music, kwaito. Other genres are relegated to specific programmes and often these are given limited time. Examples were given of genres such as Maskandi, Mbaqanga and many others that are relegated to certain programmes or even stations, thus perpetuating tribalistic trappings. For instance, Maskandi is played mainly on Ukhozi fm, whereas Lesedi fm plays popular Basotho Accordion-led rhythms. Even in terms of choral music, it was observed that a station like Lesedi fm would play mainly Mr Mohapelwa's music, whereas Ukhozi fm would play only Mr Khumalo's compositions thus perpetuating ethnic stereotypes.

Related to the question of which genres receive prominence is how sponsors choose some genres and not others. Many local and even international companies support certain music programmes, eg., Top-20 programmes. Almost all programmes that receive financial support from sponsors are for kwaito music if not for international pop (read American). One participant at the Gauteng meeting asked cynically: "Have you heard about a Maskandi Top 20?"

- **Lack of consultation with staff on changes**

It can be argued that there needs to be a semblance of meaningful consultation within the broadcaster. An example that comes to mind when talking about this point is how unions within the SABC were effectively sidelined and marginalised when management made decisions about the bi-media project. Despite the fact that Mwasa obtained and made available convincing studies from Britain and Australia that showed that the project had failed in many countries where it was implemented, management continued to implement the project.

It was a slap in the face for the SABC management when it had to finally admit that the bi-media project had failed. Had the management taken the advise of Mwasa - and, therefore, lived up to the ethos of a public broadcaster and not operated like a corporate management - the broadcaster could have been saved from both the financial loss and political embarrassment of the bi-media project.

The bi-media system, recommended by McKinsey and Associates, was opposed by a number of groups, including the FXI, on the basis that it was not workable. At the time of its implementation by the SABC, the system was being done away with by the BBC.

According to a senior assignments editor who formed part of our sample, the bi-media concept was a gross misunderstanding of a system that existed somewhere in the world and was forced down the throats of SABC journalists, despite the fact that they opposed it. This editor argued that the BBC is a worldwide news agency and it therefore made financial sense for it to employ bi-media instead of having two journalists, one for radio and the other for television, in all the major cities where it has bureaus. He added, however, that in Britain, where the BBC has its headquarters, it maintained separate journalists for both television and radio.

There was general relief that the SABC was reverting to the separate systems of radio and television news. Part of the reason for this relief is that many felt that radio news was compromised in favour of television. One journalist related how he always struggles whenever he writes news items. He has to constantly shift from the mood of writing for television to writing for radio, and vice versa. Another journalist felt that she is more competent as a television journalist and therefore felt that her input into radio news was unsatisfactory. She said:

'I was never given any training on how to handle the two mediums equally. To be honest, I am not proud of a single story that I wrote for radio'.

One producer said that he always has to rewrite news items for his station because most of the items that are sent from the SABC's head office in Auckland Park and other centres carry a "television slant". In that way the quality of radio news is compromised.

Another consequence that affected the quality of radio news is that as a result of merging the two operations (radio and television news) radio production assistants, who would ordinarily assist with audio mixing, were made redundant. The political manoeuvrings that accompanied the implementation of bi-media worsened the situation. Many journalists were scared to raise critical questions about the effect of the implementation of bi-media on the quality of radio news. They feared political suppression.

- **Lack of accessibility of stations to listeners**

Like other public institutions, broadcasting must be accessible to the public. The broad impression that emerges from the research indicates that there are few, if any, forums available to audiences to participate in the affairs of the stations that were visited, which raises questions around how the broadcaster can claim that it is serving the public.

The research sought to establish to what extent listeners have access to the stations and whether they have any input in the programming of the stations, whether they can in any way influence the choice of programmes and to what extent their views are incorporated into decisions made over programming. For the purposes of this particular study there was also an attempt to establish what the understanding of stations is around what constitutes access. The overall response to this question was that listeners do have access to stations.

Access to stations by listeners, as understood by the respondents can be categorised into the following:

- Listeners can participate in phone-in programmes to share their views. This happens mainly during talk shows where particular topics are discussed;
- Listeners can also be invited to write in and share their views about certain programmes and how they can be changed or improved. This can take different forms. They can either lay complaints that the management can take into consideration to either improve the content of the programme or, in some cases, change the hosts of such programmes;
- Listener views can also be solicited when stations want to change the overall programming of stations.

While the overall response was that listeners do have an avenue to raise their concerns, a number of limitations on what can be achieved by these were identified. At Lesedi fm the respondents questioned the value attached by management to listener views. The view shared by the respondents was that listeners are "misled into believing that they can make a contribution". This is compounded by the fact that the listenership of the station, or at least those who participate in the phone-in programmes or write letters, largely lack the "intellectual capacity to question issues in a manner that can force the station to consider their views".

The respondents at Lesedi fm gave an example of the influence white audiences of stations like SAfm can have when they voice their dissatisfaction over the content of a particular programme. For them black audiences have not as yet reached a level where they understand that as listeners they have a legitimate claim to make against a station when it does not meet their needs. This is attributed mainly to the history of the country and, in particular, radio in the black community where listeners, firstly, did not understand their role in relation to the public stations they listen to and, secondly, the fact that before the 1994 general elections black people were not allowed to participate in public discussions. In cases where they are invited to participate, the discussions and debates are shallow. It is mainly "less educated" people who participate in debates hosted by African language stations. The perception is that "educated" listeners are not keen to add their voices to such discussions and debates. In this way stations are denied critical voices that can add value and assist them to understand what listeners need.

A serious paradox emerges when trying to better understand this development. On the one hand, there is emerging evidence that shows that stations are gradually "crowding out poor and uneducated" listeners in favour of middle-class listeners. Yet, this exercise seems not to have translated into a "meaningful" contribution from the favoured middle classes with regard to participation in debates. Does that mean that if indeed these stations have succeeded in attracting this class of listeners, they (the middle class) remain "silent supporters" who do not want their voices to be heard? If so, and if indeed the perception is that debates are of a low quality because the less educated participate in them, what then attracts the middle class to these stations? Or, to put the question the other way round, what does the management of stations use to attract middle-class audiences? Is it information? Maybe not! Can it be education? We doubt it!

It appears to us that the only answer left is entertainment. This might explain the shift in entertainment formats or the serious struggles these stations have in promoting local entertainment forms in favour of mainly American forms, hence Icasa's prescription. What we can say at this point is that the argument that PBS stations aim to attract middle-class audiences and that they have succeeded in doing so is not as simple as it might sound.

Another problem identified by the respondents is that often when listener views are invited, the hosts limit the extent to which listeners can voice their criticisms against stations. Secondly, the hosts of such programmes do not "research" their topics sufficiently and, therefore, discussions and debates end up being shallow.

One case that demonstrates that viewers' concerns are seldom taken into consideration happened at Lesedi fm when a popular women's and children's

presenter was demoted without any explanation in spite of the fact that many listeners liked her. Despite the fact that there was an "outcry" from listeners who wanted the presenter reinstated to the show, she was not reinstated. This vindicated the perception that listener views are not taken seriously by the station. The case of this presenter is in direct contrast to what happened some years ago at Motswedding fm when the popular presenter of an African music programme, Moribo wa Africa, was brought back after a public "outcry" when the management removed him from the programme.

The success of the "outcry" to reinstate the presenter was a demonstration of the potential influence listeners can have. This is a force that is often ignored, a force that is so potent yet, so marginalised. This is a force that, if harnessed, can assist a broadcaster to become a real public institution. Are stations exploiting this force?

As indicated above, some stations do attempt to get their listeners to participate in how programmes can be improved. Towards the end of 2001, Thobela fm listeners were invited to write letters suggesting programme changes. The writer of a letter with the most innovative ideas stood a chance of winning R500. The station management said that it was going to process the letters and the ideas from the letters would be aggregated and merged with the internal changes that the station aimed to implement. The station effected changes to its programming on the 1 April 2002. It is not clear whether some of the changes effected by the station incorporated the views of the listeners.

On being questioned about the real value attached to the views of the listeners from the letters, the station admitted that they would probably be aligned with the station's assessment of its own programmes as per research which was carried out according to the station's own needs. The implication of this is that even in cases where listeners felt strongly about a particular point, their views would have to be in line with the need to reposition the station. This repositioning, in turn, would take place according to the need to make the station attractive to higher LSM listeners who, as mentioned earlier in this book, are increasingly being targeted in order to make the station attractive to sponsors and advertisers.

At Ukhozi fm the station management listen to the listeners' views once a month in a 30-minute slot. Listeners are said to use this time to raise a lot of complaints. It is said that many even write to different local newspapers to complain about the station. At Munghana Lonene fm the management interacts with the listeners through a phone-in programme once every three months.

While acknowledging these attempts by different managements to listen to listeners' views, many questioned the genuineness of these exercises. The general feeling was that there is very little indication that listeners' views are taken into consideration. For instance, the general feeling is that letters that are written by listeners "end up in the dustbin". For many, these write-ins and phone-ins are simply public relations exercises that give a false impression that listeners' views are taken into consideration while the truth is that it is the views of the management's, influenced by the quest to reposition stations in order to attract more sponsorships and advertisers, that end up determining the programme content of stations.

An overall assessment of listener participation is that there is very little being done to facilitate such access. In practice, at the moment, stations, and the broadcaster in general, operate like stand-alone institutions when it comes to public participation. Except for a failed attempt at civil society participation in the form of the Friends of the SABC, there has been no attempt on the part of the SABC to draw in listener participation at station level. Unless there is a serious and well co-ordinated attempt to develop a comprehensive and well thought out strategy to draw listeners closer to the broadcaster, the current corporatisation process has the potential to further alienate listeners from the broadcaster.

What is more important and perhaps even more worrying is that the non-existence of any programme to bring in listener participation minimises the public accountability of the broadcaster. Currently, it can be said that the broadcaster only accounts to the public through the Portfolio Committee on Communications and the Minister of Communications (as the sole shareholder of the broadcaster) with regard to compliance with the Broadcasting Act, and to Icasa with regard to compliance to licensing conditions and, lately, compliance to local content quotas. The amendments to the Act only make vague references to public accountability, with only broad principles included, without any clear operational mechanisms, thus making the principles useless in practice.

Again, it must be said that even accountability to the above mentioned bodies is itself limited. A distinction must be drawn between elected public representatives and the public. Elected public representatives cannot replace the public. In fact it can be said that the broadcaster is only accountable to the state and not the public, and the two are totally different. Instead, there is a clear need to forge public accountability.

In the listener focus groups, there was discussion on what listeners and viewers consider as the relationship between themselves and the broadcaster. Overall, it can be argued that the SABC's services and relationship with listeners and viewers is one-way, with listeners and viewers only receiving the services but having no influence at all over what is broadcast, let alone on how the broadcaster is run.

The central argument raised by those who participated in the meetings was that the broadcaster is very "distant" from its audiences. There are two aspects to this assertion. Firstly, most people did not, and still do not, know their rights in relation to the obligations that the broadcaster has towards them, the identified lacunae in the existing legislation notwithstanding. This has developed to such disturbing levels that one participant in Limpopo exclaimed:

'Is the SABC a public broadcaster? Honestly, I did not know about that! For me there is no difference between the SABC and e.tv for instance. I have always thought that it is privately owned. Really, how does the management and board explain the type of content that they have? It is difficult to understand that'.

There are surely many people like the participant quoted above. As this report has shown, it is difficult, judging by content and conduct, to discern that the SABC is indeed a public broadcaster. Unlike in other spheres of public service, such as water, electricity, health, education, public works and others, where people know and, to some extent, understand their rights and can often be seen demanding the

delivery of such services in a manner that improves their lives, people do not seem to understand their rights in terms of public broadcasting.

Besides the lack of knowledge and the corresponding lack of demands, the failure of the leadership of the SABC to create mechanisms of communication with listeners has led to indifference and apathy. Instead, concerns over what the broadcaster is doing, and not doing, have been reduced to being "pet projects" of a few non-governmental organisations. The latest addition to these organisations is Cosatu. What is commendable about Cosatu's concerns and interest in public broadcasting is they come from an organisation that has a mass base. Yet, even Cosatu's concern is narrow and sectarian in that it is concerned mainly about the lack of "enough labour news". The fixation that Cosatu has with regard to the need to broadcast labour issues from a favourable working-class perspective was demonstrated at the Cape Town and Rustenburg meetings. Because the Rustenburg meeting comprised only Cosatu members, the whole discussion centred on the need to have working class centred news. An emphasis was also placed on the need to have labour slots on PBS radio, as is happening on community radio as a result of a partnership between the Workers World Radio Productions and NCRF-affiliated stations. Cosatu participants in Cape Town also emphasised the need to have labour programmes on public radio and television. Whereas this is a genuine concern, it has limited the federation to its own interests instead of focusing on broader interests. Hence, Cosatu is missing an important opportunity to make the demand for a proper broadcaster a working-class, and, therefore, a mass-based demand. This narrow articulation of interests echoes the broader social divisions opening up in South African society where the interests of a labour aristocracy become increasingly divorced from the interests of the unemployed.

The second factor related to the perceived "distance" between the SABC and audiences is the fact that there is no existing platform for listeners to make their views known, let alone to influence the broadcaster's policy and programming. A common retort to this is that audiences are often invited to send their views to the station. But, as the focus groups with SABC staff revealed, audiences do send in letters making suggestions, but, they are often ignored. There is a simple reason for that: there is nothing that obliges the SABC leadership, both at corporate and station level, to take the audience's view into consideration. There are also no direct mechanisms to make the SABC accountable to these audiences.

The unavailability of any platform where audiences can get an opportunity to influence the broadcaster gives rise to a situation where the broadcaster can lose listenership and viewership without any means of recourse, that is, without any means of bringing back such audiences. It can be argued that attempts on the part of the SABC to increase audiences would be made without knowing what made audiences abandon its services in the first place. It can further be argued that formulating solutions without knowing real causes can lead to further alienation of audiences, as those solutions might not be what audiences want.

Relying on quantitative market research is not the solution to the concerns of audiences. In fact, placed against the background of the growing commercialisation of the broadcaster, this can give rise to a further shift from poorer communities towards targeting, or wanting to attract, middle class audiences. The middle-class "market" is thin and there is competition for this layer of audience. Most likely to be

left behind in this competition are African-language stations who will have to compete for audiences with stations like SAfm, Metro fm, 702 Radio, and other smaller yet powerful and growing stations like the privately owned Kaya fm.

What the above observations and arguments suggest is that, if given due consideration, with a corresponding political will, the creation of platforms for audiences to interface and influence the content and direction of the broadcaster can be the most effective, and ,more importantly, cheaper, mechanism to ensure that most PBS radio stations grow. This can, if done properly, assist in strengthening the broadcaster and addressing, without any more expense, the growing competition that the broadcaster is gradually facing from other privately owned broadcasters.

- **Hegemony of officialdom in news**

'We are not playing our watchdog role fully. What some of us fail to realise is that when the new dispensation dawned it did not mean total change in the lives of our people. We seem to be hesitant to investigate a black government. There is this notion that we must give it a chance. That for me amounts to personal censorship'.

These views were shared by the interviewees at Lesedi fm, who argued strongly that many stations have turned into propaganda machines for the government. They argued that many news bulletins take sides with the government. In their observation, most SABC news items have to include the views of a government spokesperson, either a minister or deputy minister, ministerial spokesperson or a senior department official. For them there is "a hegemony of officialdom" in most news items to the extent of "ministers having slots". There is also a lot of self-censorship. Those who raise questions against these practices are either censored, isolated, or suppressed, with labels of unpatriotism given to them.

An example of the kind of censorship that exists within the SABC is the recent incident of former South African Defence Force (SADF) soldiers who demonstrated near the Botswana border. Despite the fact that in international media circles such an incident would have received major coverage because it carried the potential of turning into a mini mutiny, Motswedding fm would not give the incident the full and deeper coverage that it deserved. A more comprehensive coverage of the story was allegedly suppressed by some editors who apparently felt that the story was an embarrassment to the government, leading to one journalist stating that he felt like "calling the international media to cover the story because we ourselves were incapacitated".

The listener meetings also discussed the question of news and current affairs. The Broadcasting Act charter stipulates that the public service arm of the broadcaster should:

'Provide significant news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance and independence from government, commercial and other interests'.

The above noble principle was shot down by a participant in Limpopo who is a member of Jubilee 2000 and the APF:

'The SABC thinks it has a mandate to protect the government. They do not expose such issues as privatisation and their negative effects on society'.

A participant in Durban, a member of the CCF, had this to say:'

'Clearly, the SABC is the mouthpiece of government. Sometimes I feel that it might be a bit unfair to accuse them of being biased. They simply serve bigger agendas that they themselves do not understand nor have control over. As the old adage goes, "they serve the master"'.

The main question that many participants asked is what is considered newsworthy? This question stems from the fact which many considered activities that they, and their organisations, engage in, as being newsworthy. Yet, despite the fact that some had media skills training and consider themselves knowledgeable in terms of media relations and publicity, their stories, or organisations, continue to be sidelined or ignored. Who determines what is newsworthy is also very important to know, as the criteria used to choose what is newsworthy is another source of concern.'

There is an implied suggestion that censorship is being practised against those ideas that are considered to be opposed to the political thrust of the government.

Drawing from what is clearly a Chomskian analysis of how big media operations work, participants at the Cape Town meeting argued that the SABC is guilty of "manufacturing consent". One participant, who stood out in terms of an understanding of Chomsky's theory said the following, mixing in Althusser's theory:

'The media is the ideological state apparatus. It is there to protect an increasingly repressive state. It does not cater for dissenting views. Rather, it ensures that it propagates the views of the state where the state itself fails to do so. This is how that capitalist system works'.

Besides the view that the broadcaster is politically biased, news and current affairs are also considered to be stereotyped. It is possible to categorise stereotypes according to province. The following examples were given: Limpopo is considered to be a province of witches and communities who burn them; Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape are provinces where everyone is corrupt; Gauteng is the heartland of crime; Western Cape is known for gang warfare; KwaZulu-Natal is the land of the warlords; Northern Cape is a paradise for child molesters. Instead of assisting to eradicate these stereotypes, the public broadcaster is seen as perpetuating them. It was also felt that there is too much violence and sensationalism in the news.

While on the face of it some of the points seem contradictory - such as saying the broadcaster focused mainly on negative news, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, criticising it for being too favourable to the government - the picture that emerges is much more complex. Participants argued that although they felt the broadcaster should not always promote the government, that did not mean the sole focus should be on bad news. Somehow this resonates with the view that, while remaining critical, greater care must be taken to ensure that a feeling of paranoia is

not developed, where everything is deemed to be crumbling. A balance should be maintained for fairness, balance and critical debate that shapes development while not producing paralysis.

The following assertions by a participant at the Umtata meeting summarised the above view very well:

'Telling the truth does not mean that we want a weak government, or we want to weaken the government. We live in a democratic country, we must hear all views. It is grossly unfair that all that we hear about government is when this or that minister opens a creche somewhere, without telling us about other hardships that are faced by many communities'.

There is also a view that sometimes certain presenters are only concerned with scandals. Again, as in the case of other perceived negative issues, what participants did not argue against is that there are indeed many scandals occurring on a daily basis. Arguing against them should not necessarily be understood as a cry for "feel good" news and current affairs. Rather, there can be robust political, economic, and social debate without overemphasising scandals.

A participant at the Umtata meeting claimed that journalists from Umhlobo Wenene fm would not honour invitations to give coverage for positive stories, yet they (journalists) are the first to arrive at the scene of social scandals.

The subject of news and current affairs was arguably one the most fiercely debated points raised regarding SABC services. There was almost total agreement in all meetings that the SABC is failing to serve or give equal opportunity to all political persuasions. It was felt that the SABC gives more airtime to the government and denies airtime to other groups in society, such as those that are opposed to privatisation and other market-related initiatives.

- **Uneven investment in programming**

Focus group participants observed that programming for African-language stations, particularly for news and current affairs, is of a lower standard as compared to say, SAfm. Without doubt, given the fact that SAfm is being promoted as the "flagship" of good radio in South Africa, and that it targets mainly higher LSM listeners, the simple conclusion that can be reached is that "good radio is the preserve of the elite" while the working class deserves "bad radio".

One contestable idea brought up during the Limpopo and Mpumalanga meetings revolved around Thobela fm's Are Boleleng. This is a talk-show where people can discuss their personal problems on air. The criticism levelled against this programme is that African people do not discuss their problems in public in this way. Of course, this is a contestable argument in the sense that at its root is the belief that African people are secretive and never share their problems, which can be seen as a reductionist characterisation of African people. Such an assumption seems to suggest that African people are static in the manner in which they handle their personal affairs and that they are not able to go beyond the known and traditional.

However, one participant, a former school teacher, raised a more interesting point when he argued that the main problem with the programme is that there is seldom a trained professional who can provide counselling and proper advice to those who present their problems. A comparison was made with other stations such as Metro fm, where a professional is always present during such programmes to give accurate and informed advice. There is also a facility with Metro fm programmes to refer those who might need more assistance to a professional. A conclusion made from this concern and observation is that there is not enough investment in African-language stations.

This point was made at some stage by the deputy director-general responsible for broadcasting in the Department of Communications, Joe Mjwara. He argued that unlike SAfm, which is given huge amounts of resources to become a well functioning full-spectrum station, African-language stations are not given the same resources that would enable them to have quality programmes. Yet, on paper, all public broadcast service stations are supposed to be full-spectrum stations.

The issue of stations being "real" full-spectrum stations was also raised by Ihron Rensburg. After explaining why PBS stations were "forced" to become income-generating rather than being cross-subsidised by PCBS stations, he said that after the "stabilisation phase", which has been achieved, the next stage will be the "new programming" phase. This phase will entail the introduction of new programming formats that will lead to all PBS stations being "real" full-spectrum stations without any pressures to generate revenue for sustainability. Indeed, at the time of writing this book, there were some positive signs for television which could prove more fruitful if applied to radio. There were moves to improve programming for SABC 2 and make it a "full family station" that would cater for the needs of all viewers.

- **Uneven deployment of technologies in stations**

The SABC employs cutting edge technology to convey education, information and entertainment to its listeners and viewers. At the beginning of 2003, the SABC purchased a multi-million-rand, state-of-the-art outside broadcast truck for live broadcasts of sports, major political events, such as elections, and other events considered of major significance.

It uses audio, visual, internet and cellphone mediums to convey information. The broadcaster also uses satellite communication to reach other African countries through its other channels, particularly SABC Africa, which broadcasts on a digital platform.

Besides the corporation having different internet sites, some of the channels have their own websites. The three television channels have sites, as do the PCBS stations.

Of all the PBS stations, only SAfm and RSG have well-developed sites that are updated several times a day and are interactive. The rest of the African-language stations do not have well-developed sites. They only have sites that contain basic information about the stations. The sites are neither maintained nor updated on a daily basis, nor are they interactive.

Inequalities in terms of possession and employment of the latest information communications technology (ICT) platforms mirror bigger societal inequalities. It is

not surprising that African-language stations would not have the latest technology platforms, whereas SAfm and RSG employ them to their fullest capacity. This mirrors what has come to be known as the "digital divide", a concept that was formulated by the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised countries in response to calls by activists for Third World debt to be cancelled.

While African language stations lag far behind in terms of having their own websites, they rely solely on audio transmission of information. The following are some of the ways in which the stations use new media to enhance their work:

- The stations use electronic mail to receive news, announcements, invitations and other alerts from the community. This assists the stations to be in touch with their communities and to develop their diaries;
- The stations also use the internet to do research. This enriches the debates that presenters and producers plan;
- All stations use the Dalet (a computerised sound recording system, which allows another use, e.g. an editor, to download pre-recorded material from a computer) to access centrally developed news from the head office and regional offices of the corporation.
- All stations have outside broadcasting programmes that are enabled by the use of modern technology that makes reception easier and clearer than was the case before.
- In a nutshell, it can be said that the stations are performing well in terms of employing new technologies, within the limits that are imposed on them by financial resources to employ much more advanced technologies. But the disparities between African language stations and other stations remain. The quality of the studio materials of the African-language stations and other stations like SAfm and RSG has all the elements of unequal development. The latter stations use the most modern gadgets that are available in the industry while the regional stations have to use older equipment.

The use of the latest ICT platforms to enhance radio broadcasts should ordinarily be a welcome development. There is general agreement that the latest technological innovations can enhance the quality and depth of information, making communication that would have been difficult to use much easier to employ. It, however, remains critical that we maintain our scepticism against "technology enthusiasts" who believe that modern technology, particularly ICTs, are a panacea for accessible and affordable broadcasting. As can be seen in relation to the SABC, the use of ICTs is exacerbating class disparities rather than assisting in closing them.

The use of outside broadcasting must also be questioned. For instance, the SABC closed the regional offices of some of the stations, notably Phalaphala fm and Munghana Lonene fm for "cost-benefit" reasons. At that time, the criticism against that decision was that moving regional stations away from places like Giyani and Tzaneen was going to physically alienate the stations from their primary target audiences. It now seems that by using OB the corporation is trying to substitute for the closed regional stations. Unfortunately, this cannot be a replacement for physical presence. The location of the two stations in Polokwane only alienates them from their primary listeners.

Another problem related to the use of OB equipment is that there seems to be a bias towards young people in terms of how programmes that are broadcast through this medium are "packaged". Also, most of these broadcasts are sponsored broadcasts, raising the question whether these are done for the benefit of the listeners - which would mean that the broadcaster is taking some pains to invest in outreach projects - or that it is sponsors who benefit through wider exposure. It would not be stretching the limits of reason to argue that those who benefit from these ventures are sponsors more than listeners and that listeners are not treated as listeners per se but as consumers.

Other problems related to the use of new technologies relate to how they are introduced to the staff. The major criticism levelled by respondents against the SABC is that staff members are not adequately trained when new products are introduced. Often training is conducted over two days only. What also compounds the problem is that some of the products that workers are trained on sometimes arrive long after training was done, when workers have forgotten most of the things they were taught. This worsens another problem - the reluctance of some older workers who do not want to use new technologies.

