

THE GOVERNANCE AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS IN THE PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS AND NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the liberalisation of the broadcasting industry by the government of Zambia that started with the enacting of the ZNBC (Licensing) Regulations in 1993 and Telecommunication Act in 1994, close to 30 community and private radio stations have been established and are operational throughout the country. This de-regulation of the broadcasting sector has contributed to the facilitation and promotion of community radio stations. This has, to an extent, reduced the dominance of ZNBC as a monopoly player in the market and continues to provide an alternative voice where ZNBC radio signals are unavailable. It is also true to mention that ZNBC radio, with the establishment of FM transmitters in all the nine provinces, has continued to dominate the provision of news and information to the majority of the population although most of the remote areas are still un-serviced with the signal. What makes so much difference is that community radio stations continue to provide programming that is relevant to local communities as opposed to national audiences. MISA Zambia, therefore believes that the government has facilitated and promoted the provision of community radio stations in the country.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY RADIO AND COMMUNITY

There is no single definition of what constitutes community radio. Kasoma¹ defines community radio station as “a sound broadcasting station that serves a specific section of society known as a community.” For purposes of this submission, Community radio stations are radio stations that are owned and operated by communities and in which the people they serve participate in not only programme origination but also production and running.

A community on the other hand is, generally speaking, a collection of people, usually living together, with common interests. Therefore, community is in both geographic

¹ Kasoma, F.P: Community Radio: Its management and Organisation In Zambia (2002:23); ZIMA; Mission Press

and interest based and the concept of community radio is premised on the idea that people want to hear their voices reflected through a medium of radio.

In Zambia, there are different types of community radio stations some of which are owned by the church, communities and private citizens.

MISA Zambia submits that community radio stations have a heavy responsibility of serving the needs of the communities within which they broadcast and exist. This is because of the enormous potential that they have to lift the standards of the people through the provision of relevant information. Here in Zambia, for example, they have raised awareness on issues such as the position of women, improving literacy and education, provision of information on health, the environment, agriculture, democracy and HIV and AIDS, among others. They are an empowering tool for many communities that are often ignored or insufficiently covered by the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and other commercial radio and television services. Community radio stations have the potential to promote good governance and capacity to mobilise the people to take ownership of their developmental destiny. Zambia for instance has been hit by problems ranging from poverty to HIV and AIDS that must be addressed and the media has a tremendous role to play.

In view of their important role in the communities within which they operate, community radio stations should see themselves not just as conveyors of information and education on various issues affecting their communities, but also as facilitators of community development. They should see their communities not as receivers of the information they broadcast but as active participants in the development processes of their communities. This means community radio stations need to allow as much community participation as possible in especially programme production.

3.0 NATURE AND MANAGEMENT

The management structure of a community radio station is based on a three-tier system of management comprising a general meeting or assembly where members of the community are represented. Under it, there is a governing council or board on which there are elected or appointed members. The role of community radio governing councils or boards is policy formulation and provision of oversight. It is

sad that in some community radio stations in Zambia, board members tend to confuse their roles with those of management. There are instances where some board members are found sitting at radio stations all the time and behave like they are full-time staff.

Boards elected from within the communities to enhance community participation should govern the stations. These should be sufficiently capable to add as much value as possible to the running of the stations and should be able to sacrifice their time and should be interested in directing the affairs of the stations. They are on the board to serve not sectional interests but the interests of the entire community. When sectional interests are allowed, conflicts arise to the detriment of the stations. This has happened at several community radio stations in Zambia where individuals sitting on the board want to carry their own hidden agendas and interest. Therefore, the people who are elected to sit on a board of a community radio station need to be independent and will not be active in party politics. There should not be any political or other interference in the affairs of community radio stations.

Between 2000 and 2002, there were instances in several community radio stations where government and political functionaries known as District Administrators (DAs) dissolved community radio boards and replaced them with their own appointees. This is unacceptable.

Under the board, there is management that is full time or part time. This should consist of qualified professionals in their fields of media management, technical, marketing and advertising, accounts, journalism etc. A Station Manager, appointed by the board, should head management teams. The manager appoints his team, often consisting of professionals heading the following departments:

1. Programmes Department

The programmes department is responsible for programmes production. Under this department are other staff as programme producers for different programmes

2. News and current affairs Department

This department is responsible for gathering, processing and producing news bulletins and other current affairs programmes. It should comprise reporters and editors on various developmental news.

3. Marketing, sales and advertising Department

This department is responsible for marketing the station to clients including selling of airtime and programmes and other fundraising for the radio station

4. Accounts Department

This is a very important department that ensures that the radio station's revenue is properly accounted for. In small community radio stations, this department is usually combined with the advertising department.

5. Technical Department

This department is responsible for ensuring that the station is on air and for all its equipment and transmission needs.

In most community radio stations, however, there is an acute shortage of qualified staff to manage various aspects of the stations. This includes boards of management. In some community radio stations, there has been consistent in fighting among board members thereby impacting negatively on the overall performance of radio stations.

4.0 FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

It is no secret that funding for community radio stations is very erratic and unsustainable. This has resulted into a serious lack of financial sustainability among community radio stations. Serious as this may be, there is still no single mechanism of funding for community radio stations in Zambia. What is available is a mixed kind of funding involving among others, donors such as UNESCO, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), and other development oriented Non Governmental organisations (NGOs). They are also funded through advertising revenue and programme sponsorship.

Since the above methods are not adequate to fund community radio stations, MISA Zambia submits that there is need for the government to enact legislation providing for the funding of community radio stations. There is also an urgent need to establish a community radio development support fund to provide grants for the development of community radio stations. While there is one such initiative in the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP), this remains largely unimplemented. Zambia needs to learn from the experiences of the statutory Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA)² in South Africa that provides funding to emerging community media institutions.

There is also need to encourage initiatives such as Breeze FM in Chipata, which despite being private radio stations, are hybrids between commercial and community radio stations and appear to be breaking even.

5.0 PROGRAMMING AND LANGUAGE

It is essential that community radio stations produce and broadcast developmental programming because after all, that is the essence of their existence. These programmes should be based on the identified needs and interests of the community. Developmental issues such, as health, HIV and AIDS, environment, poverty reduction, livelihoods, corruption and unemployment must be addressed. Community radio stations must dedicate a larger portion of their programming on issues such as these. Some radio stations have helped improve the lives of the people they serve by bringing out issues that affect the communities and allowing the community to discuss them and find solutions. It has on most occasions helped to enhance transparency and accountability in the governance of people's affairs.

As a result of a discussion programme aired by Mazabuka community radio station in Mazabuka for instance, a local council official was suspended following alleged misappropriation of resources intended for the development of *millennium 2000*, a housing project in Mazabuka town³. This followed the exposure by a radio discussion programme.

² Naughton, Tracey, *MMDA as a Model for Media Diversity Development in Africa*

³ Quarterly report on the implementation of the Radio and Good Governance project by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zambia) August 2003 - November 2003, pg. 8

Due to discussion programmes aired by Radio Chikuni, a Catholic owned community radio station in Monze, as well as SKY fm on the controversial Mbeza Sugar cane and Wheat irrigation project in Southern Province, for example, it is no secret that the project was suspended as it was going to disadvantage local communities who lived in that area where the project was to be set up. There are several other success stories too numerous to mention here. This is an attestation of what community radio can do.

While there has been remarkable progress in highlighting critical issues, there, however, are still community radio stations that struggle producing their own local content. This is linked to the lack of adequate funds to produce content as well as inadequate training as most of them rely heavily on volunteer staff who have a high staff turnover and once well trained join the mainstream media. Some community radio stations appear to have even adopted the more commercial music format due to lack of their own local content. There is need for community radio stations to partner and synergise with the more resourced mainstream media like ZNBC to create locally relevant content that could also be broadcast to a national audience on ZNBC. More needs to be done to increase the number of issue-based programming.

With regard to language, it is a known fact in Zambia that most community radio stations broadcast in multiple languages. At Chikaya Community radio station, for example, they broadcast in two indigenous languages, in addition to English. These are Tumbuka and Chewa.⁴ The same applies at Radio Maranatha in Kabwe which broadcasts in Lenje, Bemba and Tonga, besides English and at radio Mkushi which broadcasts in Lala and Swaka besides English. At Radio Lyambia in Mongu, they broadcast in Lozi and English. The same applies at radio Mano in Kasama which broadcasts in Bemba and English. This demonstrates the importance of local language in the communication of messages. By using indigenous languages, the community feel closer to the radio stations since they use languages that is spoken and understood by them. In other words, local language usage empowers the community with relevant information.

⁴ Chikaya Community Radio Station profile, 2007.

MISA Zambia believes community radio promotes the development of local languages in the communities they operate and the use of indigenous languages must be promoted. However, it is not possible for radio stations to use so many languages because it is difficult to accommodate so many languages in view of the limited time and cumbersomeness.

It is also important to note that while community radio stations should use local languages as part of the broadcast languages, tolerance of other languages should be accommodated.

6.0 COVERAGE RADIUS

Most community radio stations cover between 80-150 kms radius but this depends on their transmitter power. Some stations that have 1000-watt transmitters may even go beyond 150 kms. Coverage also depends on geographical terrain. There are some stations that despite having more wattage cannot go beyond 150 kms because they are located in hilly and mountainous areas. From a regulatory point of view, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS) who are the current regulators appear to allow only a maximum of 150 kms radius. This is reflected in most community radio licenses. There is no clear and agreed upon policy position on what should constitute the radius. The Ministry appears to restrict coverage of more than 150kms because they believe such coverage ceases to be “community” in a geographic sense. Efforts by radio stations to expand to other areas using either terrestrial or satellite technology have been hampered by the lack of clear policy position by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services. Cases in point include the Catholic Church owned radios *Maria* (Chipata) and *Yangeni* (Mansa) whose satellite technology expansion plans have been prevented by MIBS. Chipata’s *Breeze FM*’s plans to expand into Katete, Petauke and Sinda, among others, have also been prevented.

Although the ministry is restricting the radius, it is still possible to broadcast over the internet. This is already been conducted by stations like radio Phoenix, Q-FM, Chikuni etc, thereby making regulation moribund.

6.0 COMMUNITY ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Since a community radio station is supposed to be community centered in its approach, it means the community need to participate not just in the decision to establish a station but also in the affairs of the station including suggesting and making programmes. The community can participate only to an extent that they do not interfere in the day to day affairs of the station as this is supposed to be done by station management with the supervision of a governing council or board. The governing council or board represents the community. It is not possible for “the community” or everyone from the community to be involved in the running of the station literary as this has the potential to breed anarchy. However, they can participate by suggesting programming ideas and other suggestions that management and board can consider in the interest of the station. This can be done in several ways including audience surveys, focus group discussions, open days etc.

8.0 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Zambia’s broadcasting industry, that includes community broadcasting, continues to be managed, supervised and regulated by the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services under the ZNBC Act of 1987. This is despite the enacting of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act no. 17 of 2002, which effectively assumed the control, and regulation of broadcasting and the amendment of the ZNBC Act to an IBA.⁵ Efforts to have the IBA established and operating have been hampered by the lack of political will by the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services to submit names of prospective board members for the IBA and ZNBC to parliament for ratification since 2002.

The IBA Act of 2002 provides for the regulation of community⁶ and religious broadcasting.

Under the present regulatory framework, the minister continues to issue community radio licenses despite the existence of new legislation that transfers regulatory authority from the Minister to an independent board of the IBA⁷. As Banda argues:

⁵ Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Act No. 20 Of 2002

⁶ Independent Broadcasting Authority Act No. 17 of 2002, section 22, Government printer

⁷ Independent Broadcasting Authority Act No. 17 of 2002, Government printer

The minister is a politician, however, and may be forced to refuse a license to an applicant whose ideology appears to be different from that of the ruling party⁸.

9.0 LICENSING PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

As stated earlier, the ZNBC Act of 1987 is despite the enacting of the IBA Act, still responsible for the granting of licenses of community radio stations. This is despite the enacting of an IBA Act (2002) to take over the licensing function from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services.

There are no specific licensing procedures for community radio stations. What exists are **draft** *guidelines for radio and television applicants* that apply to all types of applicants whether community, subscription or commercial broadcaster. These have not been adopted and have not been developed in consultation with industry stakeholders.

1. Basically, the first step is complete an application form purchased from the Ministry, which demands submission of documentation, and information that includes the following⁹:
 - Project proposal: Presenting the whole idea about why an applicant is establishing the said station and how an applicant is going to operate the station as well as fund it.
 - Memorandum of Understanding involving the Directors of the station: This is required because the licensing authority needs to know who is involved in the running of the proposed radio station.

⁸ Banda, F, in *Up In The Air? The State of Broadcasting in Southern Africa (1998)*; Mensa A, O (Ed) Panos, Lusaka

⁹ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS), (2004); *Guidelines for Radio and Television applicants* (unpublished and obtained from MIBS).

- Bank statement: reflecting a minimum amount of Six thousand United States Dollars (\$US 6000) or a maximum of the equivalent of Twelve thousand (\$US12, 000) United States Dollars to demonstrate fully, an applicant's "financial ability to construct the station and operate for one year after construction is completed." (Act).

Sadly in Zambia, there is no present fund to assist community radio stations set up. It means, therefore, that applicants have to depend on their own financial resources or would have to find a sponsor or a donor for their radio project.

- Organisational Structure; details of how the station will be organised and who will be responsible for what. This means you one is expected to show the chart from the Chief Executive Officer to the lowest officer in the station.
 - Area of Coverage: provision of a map showing proposed coverage area or radius within which the station will broadcast to. This is intended to ensure that a station's signal does not interfere with another station's signal.
 - Infrastructure: submitting a list of all infrastructure in terms of the equipment, furniture etc, including how much these cost. They are required further, to submit written proof indicating whether or not the building that they intend to use will be rented or is owned.
 - Certificate of registration
2. This information is submitted alongside the application form to the ministry which convenes a meeting of the ad-hoc Radio and Television Licensing Committee which then considers, examines and evaluates applications based on a certain criteria and then makes recommendations to the Minister regarding the granting or refusal of licenses.

3. Once an application has been considered, a successful applicant is then informed and is granted a construction permit, upon liaising with the Communications Authority of Zambia (CAZ) and payment of prescribed fees on the availability of frequencies as applied by a potential operator.

4. If an applicant satisfies all requirements including construction of the station, they then invite the committee for an inspection and based on a technical report, they are then granted a full license or asked to resolve outstanding issues. Currently, however, unconfirmed information from the Ministry¹⁰ indicates that applicants must merely satisfy all requirements at once after which they are granted a full license following a single inspection.

Presently, license conditions tend to differ from station to station depending on what type of stations they are and what applicants say they would do during the application process. MISA Zambia believes license conditions should be based on existing policies and guidelines that a regulator develops and not just on what an applicant promises during application. Presently, the Ministry uses the very information that an applicant submits to develop an applicant's license conditions. On January 1, 2004 for instance, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS) ordered the Chipata based commercial radio station, Breeze FM, to stop the relay of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programmes saying the station's license conditions did not allow for the re-broadcast of the BBC feed¹¹. The ministry's then Assistant Secretary for Press Ms. Juliana Mwila pointed out that *in line with the station's application*, Breeze was licensed to carry foreign news sourced only from the Zambia News Agency (ZANA), the Southern African Broadcasting Association (SABA) and Pan African News Agency (PANA), and not the BBC. This means even if an operator wants to respond to market demands, regulation makes it impossible to do so.

In view of the lack of proper guidelines, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services prescribes conditions that no industry player has had sight of or has participated in their formulation. For example, community radio stations have continued to receive threats from MIBS for various reasons but mainly their alleged

¹⁰ Based on a verbal discussion with a named Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services official involved in the licensing process in June 2006.

¹¹ Alert Zambia, 6 January 2005, MISA Zambia

failure to operate within their license conditions. Unfortunately, the minister of Information and Broadcasting Services still refuses to withdraw his threats of closing radio stations whose operations made Government uncomfortable. At a recent media consultative workshop¹² on media law reforms, for instance, he said, some programmes, especially phone-ins, have the potential of causing civil unrest. Government would not sit back and watch anarchy being catalysed by the media. He stated that some community radio stations were operating irresponsibly.

Threats, therefore, appear to be the main framework the ministry uses to cow community radio stations into adhering to their license conditions. This is why MISA Zambia believes an IBA is best suited to regulate community and other forms of broadcasting as opposed to the ministry.

There is no proper policy framework governing the operations of community radio stations in Zambia. The only existing policy is the media and information policy of 1996, which in 1999 was still being revised and has not been completed to date. Under that policy, community broadcasting is mentioned without articulating its vision and guidelines under which it should operate. Instead of concentrating on the regulatory function, the role of the Ministry should be strengthening policy formulation. Regulation must be left to the IBA. The ministry appears to spend much of their time regulating community radio stations even in the absence of a proper policy and regulatory framework.

The other challenge is that the Ministry as a regulator does not differentiate which licensee pays how much. At the communications Authority presently, all applicants for frequencies pay the same amount of fees (USD450 a year) regardless of whether or not they are profit or non-profit initiatives¹³. It is not fair to place commercial

¹² Remarks by Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services Hon. Mike Mulongoti at a Consultative media workshop on media law reforms held on 23 February 2008 at Cresta Golfview Hotel cited in a presentation entitled "Government's view, position and road map regarding overall media law reform programme in the country."

¹³ Possible Implications for Regulating the Broadcasting Industry in Zambia under the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act No. 17 of 2002 –a practical perspective, Paper Presented By MISA Zambia Broadcasting Researcher Muletambo Brian Lingela to a MISA Zambia national sensitisation workshop on independent broadcasting regulation for Broadcasting Stations in Zambia held on 19 March 2004 at Ndeke Hotel, Lusaka.

media at the same level as non-commercial for obvious reasons. For most of the non-commercial community radio stations, they depend mostly on donations as opposed to their commercial counterparts that make profit. This makes it difficult for non-profit media, in this case community radio, to pay such high fees. It becomes difficult for community radio stations to facilitate easy accessibility to information in order to enhance democracy and decision-making at the grassroots level.

In addition, applicants would have to pay at both the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services and the Communications Authority of Zambia (CAZ). These administrative barriers make it difficult for people to establish community radio stations.

10. CONCLUSION

MISA Zambia recognises that the government has facilitated the creation and promotion of community radio stations in the country and that community radio stations in Zambia have a tremendous role to play in the promotion of community aspirations and national programmes. However, they are faced by numerous challenges relating to funding and sustainability; political interference; policy and regulatory, training and educational that need addressing if this role is to be consolidated. There is need to transfer regulatory authority from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services to the Independent Broadcasting Authority as this will encourage growth in the community radio sector.

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