Introduction

Community broadcasting in southern Africa is part of the democratisation process that spread across Africa and southern Africa in particular, with processes of deregulation and liberalisation of broadcasting from authoritarianism (i.e. apartheid, one-party state systems of governments) that strictly controlled the airwaves to much more participatory, democratised and liberalised broadcasting systems. In the SADC region, South Africa was one of the first to democratise the airwaves through the famous Triple Inquiry that eventually saw the adoption of the three-tier system of broadcasting, namely, public service, commercial and community broadcasting. Other countries like Zambia followed suit in the early 1990’s and opened up their airwaves to non-state broadcasting and community, commercial and religious broadcasting arose. Several other SADC countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania, and Democratic Republic of Congo also followed.

Distribution

Since the liberalisation of the broadcasting industry in SADC, South Africa has nearly 150 community radio stations and Zambia about 20 community radio stations, 10 of which are church owned. Presently, community radio stations exist, in addition to South Africa and Zambia, in Mozambique (20), Namibia (6) and Malawi (6). Although there are 20 other stations in Malawi, according to MISA Malawi, only 6 meet These include Dzimwe, Nkhotakota, Mzimba and Mchinji. Tanzania has a very diversified community radio sector with different models such that it has become increasingly difficult to give a specific figure. Congo DRC also has over 200 although mostly owned by individuals including politicians. In countries where they exist, community radio stations continue to provide an alternative voice where national broadcasters’ radio signals are unavailable and mistrusted. What makes so much difference is that community radio stations continue to provide localised programming that is relevant to local communities as opposed to national and generalised programming that appeals more to general and undefined audiences.
However, there are no community radio stations in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. There are a number of community initiatives that would like to be able to broadcast to the community, but are unable to get the relevant licensing. This is despite the existence of regulatory frameworks such as in Botswana where the National Broadcasting Board (NBB) has a mandate to license community radios, although the policy frameworks have been in draft form for nearly eight years. There are various community style initiatives - two in Swaziland, eight in Zimbabwe and two in Botswana. These do not broadcast but provide some kind of simulation, in some cases with equipment already in place. In Swaziland, Lebombo Community Radio initiative, the oldest community radio initiative in Swaziland which was started nine years ago and has been battling to get a broadcasting license from government ever since. Lebombo received three events licenses for broadcasting the King's Birthday Celebrations in 2001 and 2007 and the commemoration of World AIDS Day in 2000.

Ownership Patterns

There are regional variations in the ownership patterns of community radio stations. While some stations, like in Malawi, Zambia, (i.e Chikaya, Mkushi, Mazabuka) South Africa, Tanzania are wholly owned by communities through boards elected by community representatives and are geographically based, others are owned by faith-based institutions but call themselves community radio stations. In Zambia, for example, 8 out of the 20 stations are church owned (Icengelo, Maria, Yangeni, Maranatha, etc). This dominance appears to come out of a very strong resolve by the church to contribute to the social development of the country by encouraging tenets of good governance and social justice among possible reasons. The same applies in Mozambique, South Africa (Islam) and Angola (Ecclesia) as well as Tanzania (Radio Quran (Muslim), Radio Sauti ya Injili (Christian), radio Kheri (Muslim).

In other instances, individuals or companies own stations but are community based and driven by community development. These are referred to as “hybrid” stations i.e. Breeze FM in Zambia. It is privately owned and therefore commercial, but is located in rural eastern Zambia and therefore has a public service mission, while others are sponsored and driven by a consortium of non-governmental organisations i.e. Katutura in Namibia and Mozambique. Some stations, such as Singida radio station and Iringa radio station in Tanzania are owned by local authorities, namely Singida district authority and Iringa district authority respectively and other by the state, i.e. Mozambique via the Institute for Social Communication (ICS).

Conceptual Issues

There is no single agreed definition of what community radio is. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ARMARC) defines it as a media in which the communities participate as planners, producers and performers. It is the means of expression of the community. Kasoma defines a community radio station as a sound broadcasting station that serves a specific section of society known as a community. A community is a collective of people, usually living in the same area, with “radio owned, controlled and programmed by the community.” MISA’s definition assumes the following characterisation that is prominent and assumes either or both geographic and interest based perspectives:

- Community Ownership and control;
- Community participation at board, management, production level;
- Non-Profit making, accessible;
- Local culture and language;
- Pursues social development agenda.

This definition has been contested in some quarters with preference being given to more elasticised, broad and inclusive definitions such as that by the Zambia Forum defining community media as those interest or faith-based initiatives that serve a specific group or geographical area, are accessible to all and actively promote community participation.

Prospects and Opportunities

Because of its nature, radio in southern Africa remains the most listened to and accessible means of communication. This presents an opportunity for
community radio operators to broadcast relevant content to their audiences. Therefore, 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. In Zambia, for example, they have raised awareness on issues such as gender and the position of women, improving literacy and education, provision of information on health, the environment, agriculture, democracy and HIV/AIDS, among others. They are an empowering tool for many communities that public or commercial broadcasters often ignore or insufficiently cover.

Community radio stations have the potential to promote good governance, transparency and accountability and have capacity to mobilise the people to take ownership of their developmental destiny. Community media have a tremendous role to play in addressing problems communities face, ranging from poverty to HIV/AIDS.

Community radio stations are not just 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 origination and production.

Further, community radio stations have the potential to enhance local development in areas where they broadcast. After Breeze FM in Zambia aired a documentary on poor water supply and sanitation and another on the lack of streetlights in the provincial town, Chipata Municipal Council Town Clerk immediately responded. Within few weeks, streetlights were installed and an ambitious water supply and sanitation project was established. Radio Breeze staff were invited to the official launch of the project. Chipata now recorded streetlights on the main streets and the water and sanitation situation improved.

Community radio stations have also provided an opportunity for local people to express themselves freely and exchange developmental ideas. In Mazabuka, after Community members voiced out their concerns about suspected financial embezzlement by council officials where over ZMK 95 million, (US$ 23,750) meant for the improvement of water and sanitation, and had been misappropriated, the Town Clerk and his deputy were, consequently suspended from the council pending police investigations.

On most radio stations across the region, various issues have been discussed including those on gender and development, HIV/AIDS, health matters, access to clean water and other services such as education, farming inputs, sanitation, good roads and their local social services thereby facilitating local solutions to local challenges.

**Gender and HIV/AIDS perspectives**

According to the *Gender and Media Baseline* study, radio is widely listened to by both men and women, although the voices of women are still fewer. The challenge of
HIV/AIDS has not spared the sector. To this effect, the radio stations include as part of their programming the social-economic impact of the pandemic. However, there is need for more women sources.

In terms of specific interventions on gender, HIV and AIDS in the community radio sector, there are not that many recorded in the region. In Zambia, MISA Zambia has been training community radio producers at 15 stations on mainstreaming gender and HIV/AIDS in their radio programmes during 2008. This is in addition to the development of HIV/AIDS workplace policies for stations under the Media Action Plan (MAP) arrangement. There have been some similar initiatives in Mozambique with two regional gender-mainstreaming workshops held for community radio operators recently. Both MISA Zambia and Mozambique have reported plans to rollout their gender and HIV/AIDS policies to member radio stations. The role of SAFAIDS in this regard could be explored further.

**Challenges In Community Radio Broadcasting**

SADC’s community radio sector however continues to face a myriad of challenges as outlined following.

**Policy Inadequacies**

In most of SADC with the exception of South Africa, there is an absence of appropriate policy frameworks for community broadcasting. As John Barker, formerly MISA’ regional broadcasting programme coordinator once said, the lack of policy is in itself policy for most African governments. This is the case in Zambia and Botswana and most other SADC countries. In Botswana, particularly, parliament is yet to approve the policy that recognises community broadcasting and is dragging its feet for fear that community radio will divide the nation. “In terms of tribe and language, we are very fragile having recognised Setswana as a national language. We need guidance because we need to safeguard our peace. We feel that if this (community radio) is allowed, won’t we then negate the peace and strides we have achieved so far in keeping peace as a nation?“ asked Honourable Boyce Sebetela, former Minister of Science and Technology.

The absence of policy frameworks means that there will not be adequate guidelines and this makes regulation difficult. In Zambia, the only existing policy is the media and information policy of 1996, which has been under revision since 1999. That policy mentions community broadcasting without articulating its vision and guidelines under which it should operate. Instead of spending more time developing policy, most SADC governments spend time policing operators, threatening them and shutting them down. Examples abound in Zambia, Malawi, and Lesotho. In Swaziland, Lesotho and Zimbabwe, policy frameworks are almost non-existent although there are legislations and regulation in some cases governing operations.

**Legal and Regulatory**

With the exception of South Africa, there are no independent broadcasting regulators in the region. Ministers of information such as Zambia regulate some operators. In Botswana, the National Broadcasting Board (NBB) is not independent and currently is not authorised to license community broadcasters and reports to the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology. In Namibia, there is no independent board but the Broadcasting Bill of 1998 provides a three-tier system of broadcasting. Elsewhere like in Malawi, the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) is just semi autonomous from the state. In Malawi, MACRA regulates across public, community and private license platforms. In Mozambique, regulation is done through government agencies under the Prime Minister.
Minister’s Office, i.e. GHABINFO. For Mozambique, the Press Law does not provide for community broadcasting while Tanzania Media services Bill does provide for a three-tier system including community broadcasting although the Tanzanian law allows the state broadcaster to operate as a community radio.

In Zimbabwe, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) is not independent and no community radios have been licensed although BAZ is empowered under the Broadcast Services Act (BSA). In countries with progressive legislation to regulate broadcasting, including community radio, there is simply no political will to implement legislation, i.e. Zambia’s stalled Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act of 2002 that has not been implemented to date.

In view of the absence of a policy framework, there are no specific licensing procedures for community broadcasters in most cases. In Zambia, for example, what exist 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. ICASA is an exception. The absence of proper guidelines has given an opportunity to regulatory authorities to intimidate and clamp down on their operations. There have been threats to shut down stations i.e. in Zambia, Malawi, and DRC. Some have been closed like recently in Lesotho. There is also no transparency in allocation of licenses.

Licensing
In most countries, there is huge depolitisisation of applications especially by ministry or government-based regulators who continue to issue license. As Banda notes, 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 party.

In Zambia, for example, 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 IBA.

Administrative Barriers
In most countries, there are serious administrative barriers during the licensing processes. Presently in Zambia, there is a dual licensing process involving both the Ministry and the Communications Authority of Zambia (CAZ), the latter that is charged with the responsibility for frequency management and Ministry with content regulation. Applicants would have to pay for license fees at both MIBS and the CAZ. They also have to pay clearance fees with the Civil Aviation department. These administrative barriers make it difficult for people to establish community radio stations. There needs to be a one-stop licensing entity. In Swaziland, the Minister of Postal Services is heavily involved in the licensing process. In Namibia also, the Commission does not carry out the awarding of licenses in a fair and transparent manner. For example, a radio station with political connections has recently been licensed, while all along other applicants were turned down on the grounds that there were no frequencies available.

Throughout the region, community radio stations grapple with relatively high annual license fees, presently US$ 50 (and US$ 6000 set-up cost requirement. It is required that applicants show a bank balance of US$6000 as evidence that they have capacity to set up and operate a community radio station and US$12, 000 maximum) in Zambia, USD 500 in Malawi, USD 3000 in Lesotho.

In Zambia and until recently in Tanzania, community radio stations pay the same license fees as private broadcasters. It is not fair to place commercial 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.

Expansion Limitations
There are expansion restrictions e.g. in Zambia to allow community radio stations to operate beyond a radius of 150 kms 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* \(^{15}\) (Chipata) and *Yangeni* \(^{16}\) (Mansa) whose satellite technology expansion plans have been prevented by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS). Chipata’s *Breeze FM*’s plans to expand into Katete, Petauke and Sinda, among others, have also been thwarted. \(^{17}\) This makes it difficult for them to survive due to restricted radius.

**Sustainability**

As noted by Banda, \(^{18}\) it is no secret that in SADC, like most other developing countries, funding for community broadcasters is very erratic resulting into a serious lack of sustainability among community radio stations. As most stations are most often established within communities that are under-developed and lack resources, the challenge of maintaining them is relatively great. Presently, all existing broadcasters in the region continue to compete for the limited resources, mostly from advertising revenue and programme sponsorships.

In most of SADC, there are varying funding models. There are no present mechanisms by governments to assist community broadcasters set up and maintain with the exception of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in South Africa. Zambia’s government is moving towards establishing a Media Development Fund (MDF) though it is non-statutory. Efforts currently appear slow as this is being referred to the Citizens’ Economic Empowerment Commission (CEEC) for implementation. Donors such as UNESCO and OSISA have been some of the sponsors of some community radio stations in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia. So far, there are fewer community television broadcasters perhaps with the exception of Soweto TV in South Africa. However, the tendency by some donor to forsake community-broadcasting projects they initiated and supported without adequate capacity at set up has complicated matters. The cases in point are UNESCO initiated stations of Mazabuka and Mkushi in Zambia and Mozambique respectively.

**Inadequate technical and Management Capacity**

Concerning management and staff capacities, there are major challenges in most countries. While typical community stations with a community board in countries like Zambia struggle, others, such as those owned by the Catholic Church tend to have better management. In almost all the community stations in the region, there is an acute shortage of qualified staff to manage various aspects of the stations. This is because there is constantly very high staff turnover as stations use volunteers as employees who tend to migrate to much more lucrative commercial stations once they have gained confidence and experience. \(^{19}\) There are few trained broadcasters most of whom are employed by better paying broadcasters. Presently, as Banda notes, “training and education is still tailored for the mainstream media. There is need towards creating alternative curriculum specifically for community broadcasting.”

There is need to invest more resources in this intervention. There is also a need for capacity building to improve the governance of community radio stations. In some stations, there has been consistent intra board fighting among board members and board/management fights thereby affecting negatively on the overall performance of radio stations.\(^ {20}\) In some cases, there has been political interference in station governance, the case of Radio Chikaya *in Zambia* where government political appointees known as District Administrators took over running of the station \(^ {21}\). In some more robust stations, political intimidation by local ruling party officials, such as the case of Radio Icengelo *in Zambia* where about 50 ruling MMD cadres often stormed the station in protest against Patriotic Front’s Michael Sata.\(^ {22}\) This has occurred three times.

Further, there are poor fundraising, marketing and technical skills. There have been incidences in Namibia where stations have often asked their initial donors to repair damaged equipment without seeing this as their own responsibility.

**Local Content**

In terms of news and programming content, most stations are trying to produce locally relevant programmes that are making a difference in communities within which
they operate such as improved social service delivery and local government administration. However, this is being hampered by limited funds. For a producer to travel 80kms within the station's radius to record rural people's views, it is expensive. This has led to compromised productions. However, Urban-based community broadcasters often tend to mimic the larger commercial broadcasters, and engaging in populist content productions i.e rap music. Most urban-based stations play too much music with very little programming.

Technological Challenges
The incessant interruption and erratic power supply by Electricity Supply Corporations in the region has been a tremendous challenge to most community radio stations. In most rural based stations, this has consistently led to disruption of operations. Power surges have often led to damage of equipment such as transmitters e.g. in Mongu, Zambia for instance, a newly installed transmitter at Radio Lyambai only worked for two days and blew up on the third day because of erratic power supply and power surges. At Mkushi community radio, in Zambia, the station went off air for two (2) months from May to July 2007 due to surge Voltage that led to equipment failure. The situation was even more desperate at Chikaya community radio station in Lundazi, eastern Zambia where due to equipment breakdowns; the station's radius reduced to 7 kms from the initial 70 kms.

This has made it difficult for them to provide quality, efficient and consistent community broadcasting. Most are acquiring standby power generator sets and solar power could enable them broadcast even in situations where there is no power. However, the high cost of fuel in the case of generator sets presents another challenge to maintain them.

In most typical stations, there has been poor maintenance of broadcasting and production equipment. A visit to
Katututa Community radio station in Windhoek Namibia in September 2007 by the author presented a shocking sight of the state of equipment in the studio. My host told me that a few weeks earlier, a number of computers had been stolen from the studio. There have been incidences of studio equipment such as recorders going missing in some stations across the region. In several stations, studio equipment has been seen in a state of disrepair and unserviced.

Despite this situation, some of the more capacitated community stations seem to be adopting new technologies such as web casting and podcasting, although most continue to struggle and the best technology they could have is an internet connection mostly used to access international news and email. Some i.e. Pasme community radio community radio in Zambia, and in Tanzania, do not even have computers in the newsroom and use handwritten scripts. It is even more challenging for those located in rural areas without electricity.

As if this were not enough, the imminent migration from analogue to digital broadcasting by 2015 presents another serious challenge in the region. The big question is, are countries in SADC ready for this? Countries are currently busy trying to position them in line with this new phenomenon. Among them include South Africa, recently enacted the Electronic Communications Act as well as Tanzania, with the view to achieving convergence of technology and seamless regulation. Zambia is currently almost completed its new frequency plan.

Conceptual Issues

The very lack of an agreed definition of what community radio is in itself a challenge. The lack of proper understanding of what community radio is among policy makers, regulators and local communities is equally a challenge as the concept is relatively new. The absence of ownership and participation from the community has also been as some stations are established without community consultation, i.e. UNESCO initiatives, thereby making it difficult for them to “own” the stations. There has also been difficulty distinguishing among community, private and state broadcasting leading to capitalist oriented people to set up private stations and refer to them as community stations.

Conclusion

Community broadcasters are increasingly becoming the preferred source of information for a number of rural and urban communities in SADC because of their proximity to audiences and independence from government control, which enable them to carry programmes that reflect the aspirations and concerns of the communities they serve. Community radio stations will continue to have tremendous potential for community upliftment and development even in the future. However, there is need to address a myriad of policy, regulatory, operational and sustainability challenges. There is still a huge challenge in other countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. There is also a need to roll out gender and HIV and AIDS mainstreaming in all aspects of community broadcasting.

Writers Bio
Muletambo Brian Lingela is the Manager of Broadcasting and Information for MISA Zambia.
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