



Promoting media development and diversity, and access to information in South Africa

THE MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY AGENCY

- A DRAFT POSITION PAPER

NOVEMBER 2000

The Position Paper process

This draft Position Paper is the result of research and consultation, and includes many of the ideas, reflections and submissions of a wide variety of stakeholders. It will be finalised in the light of public comments received, and inform draft legislation that will be submitted to Cabinet and then referred to Parliament for consideration during its 2001 session.

How to respond to this draft Position Paper

Any member of the public is invited to comment on this draft Position Paper. Please note the following:

- ◆ Each point made should refer directly to the relevant numbered section (e.g. 6.1.2).
- ◆ Where information under a particular section is lacking or incorrect, such information should be supplied, with appropriate source references.
- ◆ If comments made or information supplied do not fall under any particular section, these should be placed under a heading called "Additional information".

Written comments should be sent to:

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Closing date: Monday 29 January 2001.

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This Position Paper is also available on our website:

<http://www.gov.za>

The Executive Summary is available in all official languages on request.

"Everyone has a right to freedom of expression, which includes:

- (a) freedom of the press and other media, and
- (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas."

From the South African Constitution, Chapter Two, Section 16

"Open debate and transparency in government and society are crucial elements of reconstruction and development. This requires an information policy which guarantees active exchange of information and opinion among all members of society..... The democratic government must encourage the development of all tiers of media - public, community and private. However, it must seek to correct the skewed legacy of apartheid where public media were turned into instruments of National Party policy; where community media were repressed; where private media are concentrated in the hands of a few monopolies, and where a few individuals from the white community determine the content of media. New voices at national, regional and local levels, and genuine competition rather than a monopoly of ideas, must be encouraged"

From the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) base document, 1994.

A pluralistic press is "the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community"

1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, 1994.

Government should "facilitate the process of setting up a statutorily recognised media development agency comprised of independently recognised elected trustees, which agency will operate a statutorily recognised subsidy system for community and independent media in South Africa".

Comtask Report, 1996.

"A central public interest principle in broadcasting is that of universal access, that is, the availability of broadcasting services to all citizens. In South Africa it is also desirable to expand the concept of access from the right to receive information to include greater access to the means of production in broadcasting. The question of access relates directly to the principle of diversity. Access to choice and diversity of choice includes access to a diverse range of language, cultural, religious and regional programming. The real significance of diversity within the framework of national unity is that it secures other benefits for society such as a substantial degree of media pluralism. At least five dimensions of diversity are: media functions; content; representation of different groups and people; geography or locale; and media ownership limitations."

White Paper on Broadcasting Policy, May 1998

"Society benefits from free, independent, and pluralistic media. But to achieve this, a supportive policy environment is required, and it must be proactively encouraged by public and private sectors, the international community and multilateral agencies...[One initiative would be to] develop independent media support agencies (voluntary or statutory) which provide assistance through loans and subsidies, and/ or other measures such as postal rate or connectivity cost reductions (e.g. the Media Development and Diversity Agency being established in South Africa)"

Resolution of the Global Knowledge II Conference, Malaysia, March 2000

"It is recommended that the current attempts to establish the Media Diversity Agency be given greater impetus. The private sector should be encouraged to support such an initiative and if necessary funding and support should be made available by both government and the private sector to promote and encourage greater diversity in ownership"

South African Human Rights Commission, Faultlines: Inquiry into Racism in the Media, August 2000. (Supported by the SA National Editors Forum)

"Democracy requires a media that is free from state or corporate control. Throughout the 20th century it has been recognised that corporate control can pose as great a threat to media democracy as state control. The state has a duty to create conditions for a diverse and democratic media. One such measure is anti-monopoly controls. Another measure to correct structural inequalities in the market is to encourage and support new media. The initiative by the Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS) [to set up a Media Development and Diversity Agency] should therefore be encouraged and supported."

Declaration of Principles on Information, Power and Democracy adopted in Cape Town on 10 October, 2000. Endorsed by the Institute for Democratic Alternatives (Idasa) and the London-based freedom of expression NGO Article 19.

FOREWORD

South Africa is still burdened by the special form of colonialism that has shaped our country. This legacy plays itself in various spheres of society, including the media, where the nature of public discourse is shaped by patterns of ownership and control, such that the poor and disadvantaged remain marginalised.

While there have been many changes in the media since our country's first democratic elections in 1994, there is clearly much more that needs to be done. The media in our country still represents a narrow range of interests, which is not reflective of our country's diversity. While the market can play a crucial role in diversifying the media, additional mechanisms are needed to meet the needs of all our people.

Government has taken the bold step of preparing for the setting up of an independent agency that will address problems of media development and diversity in South Africa.

It is important to stress that the proposed Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) will not interfere in the content of any newspaper, television or radio station. Its primary purpose is to help create an enabling environment for media to develop and meet the diverse needs of all South Africans. This includes those marginalised because of factors such as gender, race, disability, geographical location, class or income, as well as marginalised schools of thought - including, ironically, that of the broad liberation movement that fought against apartheid.

While the scale of what is required to fully address media imbalances will be beyond the scope of the MDDA, it will play a key catalytic role through its funding, facilitation, advocacy, and research. This draft Position Paper was formulated through consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including statutory bodies, the media and advertising industry, community media, NGOs, academics and trade unions. It is now being presented to the broader public for further comment, before a final Position Paper and draft legislation is presented to Cabinet and Parliament.

This participatory approach is embedded in the character of the proposed MDDA, in that its success rests very much on a partnership between government, the private sector and civil society.

It is in this spirit that we invite you to submit comments on this paper, so that we can feel sure that the MDDA will meet the needs and expectations of all South Africans.

Dr Essop Pahad
Minister in the Presidency