

1 Introduction

South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid permeates all facets of social life, including the media. This is reflected in the patterns of media ownership and control, including imbalances within the newsrooms. Alternative media platforms that emerged in earlier periods to give expression to the views and perspectives of the majority were either suppressed, or unable to survive under market conditions shaped by the legacy of our history. The result has been a public media discourse shaped by a narrow range of interests.

The challenge of democratic transformation in South Africa as it affects the media is a challenge to ensure that all interests, sectors and schools of thought are adequately catered for by the media industry.

1.1 Government's commitment

Government is committed to ensuring media development and diversity and promoting development communication. This is being done through a range of instruments, including an independent regulator for the broadcasting industry, legislation facilitating access to information and the setting up of Multi-Purpose Community Centres. A critical instrument in this regard is a Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) that will address the legacy of exclusion from access to the media and promote media pluralism in South Africa. The agency will complement, but not duplicate the work of, other statutory and institutional initiatives, to assist in ensuring that the freedom of expression and access to information clauses in our country's Constitution are realised.

However, media development and diversity can only be achieved through the active participation of the media industry and society as a whole. This includes initiatives that bring change to the composition of newsrooms and the management echelon, enhance media training, and allow the ownership and control of large media enterprises by as wide a range of social interests as possible. The MDDA's key role will be to help create an enabling environment. It will work with media industry players to encourage efforts towards redressing the inequities of the past, and enhancing the diversity of views in South Africa's media discourse. This includes contributing resources and skills. In pursuit of deepened democracy and development, all concerned need to work in cooperative harmony.

1.2 Background

Government's decision to establish an MDDA is informed by the Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask) recommendation in 1996, which stated that 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".

This decision was further endorsed by the National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, which was adopted by Cabinet in 1998. The Plan emphasises the need to promote freedom of expression and media diversity, and government's central role in ensuring that there are instruments, like the MDDA, for this purpose.

The MDDA will complement and strengthen, but not duplicate, the role and impact of other statutory bodies set up to ensure related objectives. Other statutory initiatives in recent times include the Interception and Monitoring Prohibition Act of 1992, Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993, Postal Act of 1995, Film and Publications Act of 1996, Telecommunications Act of 1996, Broadcasting Act of 1999, Access to Information Act of 2000 and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa) Act of 2000.

The MDDA will be set up within a context of competing demands for limited public resources. Government recognises this in its recommendations around the role, relationships, functioning and funding of the MDDA.

An interdepartmental committee has acted as a government reference group in the development of the Position Paper. It consists of the departments of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, Communications, Education, Finance, and Trade and Industry, as well as the Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Service in the Presidency. The Government Communication and Information System has acted as the lead department.

This Position Paper has benefited from consultations with a wide range of stakeholders (see Annexure 1) as well as research into the media environment.

1.3 Defining media development

Media development is aimed at redressing the exclusion and marginalisation of a vast range of groups and interests from access to media - as owners, managers and producers of media. It is an integral part of freedom of expression and of creating a country based on democratic rights, social equality and respect for human dignity.

In the first instance it requires developing the media environment and infrastructure. South Africa's democracy needs an enabling environment for the media industry to grow in an accessible manner, and for its growth to be sustainable. This includes expanding the media infrastructure as a means of developing an informed citizenry in an information age, as well as encouraging South Africans to take advantage of new technology that will lower the threshold of entry into media.

The MDDA will therefore implement or support projects that will do this, including amongst other things:

- ◆ Media research
- ◆ Capacity development, including journalistic, management, strategic, business and financial skills
- ◆ Networking (at local, national, regional and international levels)
- ◆ Literacy projects that encourage reading and the emergence of a self-informing public
- ◆ Media financing

In addition, the MDDA will work with other bodies around issues such as media freedom, media ethics, media policy, media technology, media economics and small business development.

1.4 Defining media diversity

Media diversity is about ensuring that all interests and sectors have affordable access to a range of opinion and sources of information that is fully reflective of our society. Indicators of diversity are manifold, and include:

(a) Identifying which sectors of people are ill-served by the media industry, and largely excluded as media owners, managers, consumers and producers.

(b) Looking at whose needs and experiences are not adequately met by or reflected in existing media. This position paper identifies the following priority sectors amongst the disadvantaged and marginalised:

- ◆ Working class and poor people
- ◆ People living in rural areas
- ◆ People living in poorly resourced provinces, cities, and towns
- ◆ Women
- ◆ Youth and children
- ◆ Marginalised language groups
- ◆ Illiterate people
- ◆ The aged
- ◆ People with disabilities

(c) Looking at where there is a lack of diversity in content and format, relating to, for example, culture, language, gender, range of opinion and perspective.

Using (a), (b), and (c) as indicators, media diversity comprises diversity in the following:

- ◆ Ownership
- ◆ Management
- ◆ Creative and production control
- ◆ Affordable choices, for audiences and readers
- ◆ Access to media, including different languages, styles, formats, geographic or regional interests
- ◆ Content, including opinion, news and advertising.

In addition, the achievement of diversity in choice and access is facilitated by the availability to a diverse range of media, small and large, of the means of distribution.

1.5 Development communication

The MDDA will support projects that enable media to promote democratic and socio-economic rights through their operations and/or content, such that the public and communities are empowered to actively participate in development. This would include, for example, promoting race and gender equality, education, health care, improved basic services, job creation and environmental awareness.