

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Africa's media history reflects the fissures and divisions within society as well as the distribution of power. The challenge of democratic transformation affects all spheres of social life, including the institutions and practices of the media.

Government is committed to creating an agency to promote access to the media by marginalised groups and to enhance media pluralism. This follows a Cabinet decision based on a Comtask recommendation in 1996. It is in accordance with the Constitution, Bill of Rights and the Reconstruction and Development Programme and is further motivated by the National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, which emphasises freedom of expression and media diversity, and the need for mechanisms to ensure that this is achieved. It follows an unsuccessful attempt by civil society to form such a body in the early 1990s.

The motivation for an independent, separately located and cost-effective Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) rests on the need for a body of respected media specialists and other public figures that will, through funding, facilitation and research, develop expertise around media development and diversity and ensure their realisation. It will operate on the best principles of corporate governance with a mandate and requisite resources. It will operate at arms length from government, the media industry and other donors.

As the world moves rapidly towards an information society, it is critical that all citizens have access to the widest range of information and opinion in order to participate effectively in an increasingly integrated world at local, national and international levels. Government has made access to information integral to its reconstruction and development programme.

The MDDA, like the programme of Multi-Purpose Community Centres, is a key initiative towards this objective. It will help alter the communications environment in a way that builds infrastructure and fosters the emergence of media reflecting the experiences and perspectives of the marginalised. In other words, while the MDDA will not by itself bring about the complete transformation of the media, it will, through its funding, facilitation, advocacy and research functions, play a key catalytic role in altering the media landscape in a way that will be conducive to broader changes.

Defining media development and diversity:

Media development involves promoting an enabling environment to help redress exclusion and marginalisation of groups and interests from access to media - as owners, managers and producers of media. Media diversity is about ensuring that all interests and sectors have affordable access to a range of views and information sources fully reflective of our society. The achievement of diversity is also facilitated by the availability, to a diverse range of media, small and large, of the means of distribution.

Media in South Africa:

Whilst much has been done since the advent of democracy to address problems of media development and diversity, it has clearly not been enough. The density of media infrastructure per capita remains low. Media ownership is still concentrated and does not meet the needs of all groups and interests. Representivity is still inadequate at management, editorial and general staffing levels.

South African experience has shown that market forces, opportunities for licences and changes in ownership on their own cannot fully achieve this transformation. An agency like the MDDA is needed.

Drawing on experience:

International experience shows that support schemes to promote media development and diversity are not new. They have been implemented in Europe since the 1950s on the basis that market forces alone would not achieve sufficient diversity. Indeed, the evidence is that the market on its own tends towards increased concentration, which can inhibit freedom of expression and a diversity of views.

An earlier attempt to form a voluntary support mechanism, the Independent Media Diversity Trust, eventually failed for lack of funding. This has reinforced the view that only initiatives firmly rooted in a partnership of government and the media, and underpinned by statutory authority, will have a sustainable impact.

The character of the MDDA and its relationship with other bodies:

The MDDA will be an independent, statutory body operating on the basis of government policy and guidelines. However, it will have an arms-length relationship with government, the private sector and any other donors. Its mandate will be to promote diversity and development in print, broadcast and "new media".

The MDDA will have a Board nominated by Parliament through a public process, and appointed by the President. The Board will appoint a CEO. The CEO will, in conjunction with the Board, appoint a small highly skilled and adequately resourced staff.

It will seek collaboration with bodies dealing with telecommunications, licensing, film and video, to achieve coordination and avoid duplication. Apart from its primary role of media support, it will commission research and make recommendations to government, the media industry and other relevant bodies.

The MDDA will relate to all bodies with a direct or indirect interest in media development and diversity, amongst them the Independent Communications Authority of SA (Icasa). The MDDA will hold an Annual Review Forum where such bodies will consider the MDDA's annual report.

The beneficiaries and the nature of the support:

The main beneficiaries of direct and indirect support will be community and other non-profit media, as well as small commercial media, including radio, television, print and new media. There will be particular emphasis on projects that bring disadvantaged communities and sectors - particularly women,

rural people, the disabled, illiterate people, working class and poor people - into the information and communications loop.

Support will be of a funding and non-funding nature, and will include direct and indirect subsidies; emergency funding; capacity development; encouraging social responsibility support in the broadcast, print and new media sectors; training; project evaluation and monitoring; and media research. It will also make recommendations in support of media seeking loan finance, on the basis of its evaluation procedures.

In addition, the MDDA will work towards the emergence of national and provincial common carriers, and/or the implementation of common carrier principles, in the print industry, to ensure equitable access for small publications, and into under-served communities.

The MDDA's guiding principle in making funding decisions and loan recommendations will be the contribution that projects make to media development and diversity. It will seek to promote sustainability, and to fund projects that have good governance practices. Other considerations include community representation and participation and equity plans.

The MDDA's budget:

The MDDA needs adequate financing to cover community media network, training, capital and operational costs, as well as feasibility studies for small commercial media projects. It will commission research on media development and diversity, as well as regular performance evaluations of funded projects. Its operational needs, including performance evaluations of projects, should represent no more than 12% of total costs.

The resources needed to overcome the current barriers to media development and diversity amount to a total of R500m, over five years. It is envisaged that the MDDA will meet 60 per cent of these needs, which amounts to R300m over five years, or on average R60m per year.

This would be made up by R20m per year from each of government, the media industry and donors. It should be noted that government's contribution would include the support for community radio infrastructure development already given through the Department of Communications, currently at a level of R7 million per year.