

Regional radio stations should go back to basics



By Talifhani Munzhedzi

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The [troubles at the SABC](#) are well documented. It will be pointless to list them - from board dysfunction to lack of quality programming in both television and radio. One that is rarely spoken about, however, is the role of the broadcaster's regional radio stations.

When this topic is brought up I often hear just 'how many millions listeners UkhoziFm has' and 'how well the station is doing'. Very little is mentioned about what kinds of programming these stations provide to the people of the regions they serve.

Many times when I travel to different provinces I tune in to these stations to hear what is happening in the area and I am often disappointed. It is not that they don't have content; they do... lots of it. However, what I hear being broadcast is not different to what I would hear on SAfm or Radio 2000. The two stations have a national footprint and one expects to hear major stories dominating the national agenda. I personally expect that if I am listening to PhalaPhala FM or Ligwalagwala FM I should predominately hear news from Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

National stories are not enough

It is not enough to just get national stories from Auckland Park and translate it to TshiVenda or Seswati. Investments should be made in local and regional content. There is so much news happening in Limpopo for example, that there can be a split in news and programming between national and regional. I don't think that the SABC established these regional stations to simply report and translate stories that come from Auckland Park. I also don't think that these stations are there to solely provide job opportunities in the regions. What is the point of hearing a news bulletin in TshiVenda or Seswati which is exactly the same as the bulletin on SAfm or Radio 2000?

Investing in local content should be paramount for these stations in order to flourish. Although there are shows like 'Tshiko' on PhalaPhala FM which talks about current affair issues, I don't think there is enough talk show programmes that create space for local content to be included in programming. I am not advocating turning regional stations to be mini-talk stations, but appealing that these stations should be driven by local content.

Competition for listenership is rife

Competition for listenership is rife throughout the country amongst regional, national, commercial and community radio stations and at most people will tune in to those stations which addresses their issues or what is happening around them. I am not going to listen to UkhoziFM for example to find out what is happening in the Northern Cape or Limpopo, but rather when I want to know what's happening in KZN or Johannesburg.

At UNISA Radio we are training young and upcoming journalists who should be dedicated to report stories in their area. It will not serve us any purpose to bring in journalists to the industry whose goal is to chase politicians. Now is the time to be focused to communities.

ABOUT TALIFHANI MUNZHEDZI

Talifhani Munzhedzi is a deputy station manager at UNISA Radio. The radio station strives to be amongst the few if not only campus radio stations to provide the talk radio format to students and staff. To listen to UNISA Radio go to <http://radio.unisa.ac.za>, to contact Tali Munzhedzi email Munzhta@unisa.ac.za.

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