



ABOUT THIS CHAPTER ...

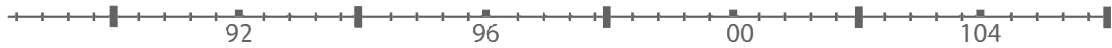
This chapter looks at the differences between commercial broadcasters and community radio stations, and highlights how these two could have a mutually beneficial, enriching partnership. It also explores what makes community radio so unique, particularly in the context of South Africa's history.

Finally, it highlights the key role of community radio – that of educating and empowering a community – and how a station can create a unified community.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY RADIO?



THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY STATIONS



A community radio station is a professional broadcaster that has to conform to many of the standards demanded from any commercial broadcaster. This is what you would typically expect in a commercial radio station. While reading the following points, note which ones are relevant to your community station:

- The programming must be well planned and aimed at the station's specific audience.
- Programme schedules must be kept to.
- Audience research must constantly be updated.
- There should never be any 'dead air' because of a technical hitch.
- The station must be able to pay its bills at the end of the month.
- Permanent staff should be paid a market-related salary.
- Volunteers/interns (if there are any) should be paid enough so that they can use public transport and buy themselves lunch.
- There is a business and a marketing plan that ensures an income and dividends for the shareholders.
- The news must be fresh, of interest to the listeners, and continuously updated.
- Presenters must be well trained and professional.
- Newsreaders must sound (and be) knowledgeable and authoritative.
- The station must be managed well, with a good human resource policy, a sound bookkeeping system and an effective way of relating to the board of directors.

Of course, a community station is not a commercial station because it has no shareholders. It has a different obligation to the community it serves, and this can be seen in its programming content.

But it must still be run as professionally as possible. While station management frequently wrestles with this issue, some of the present ICASA licence conditions are not helpful and should be reframed so that the sector can become sustainable. (One example is the obligation that the community should determine the content of the news. This seldom works in practice.)

Added to this, the community radio sector often operates as an alternative to the public broadcaster. A public broadcaster, such as the SABC, has the following aspects (again, as you read these, ask yourself how this compares to your community station):

- an income from a licence fee
- at the same time, an income from commercials
- tax breaks (such as not paying import tax)
- various state subsidies
- a massive technical infrastructure.

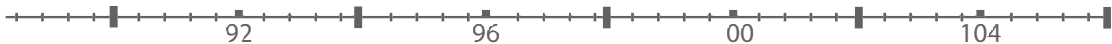
But it also has the following obligations:

- to provide educational programmes
- to provide developmental information
- to provide national news
- to cater for minority languages and cultures
- to provide programmes about the duties and obligations of good citizenship and pride in the country
- to work towards national reconciliation, nation-building and the reconstruction of civil society.

adspend
amount of money available to be spent on advertising by agencies

If you think about it, you'll see that community radio has many of the same obligations, but without any of the perks. It is a great pity that relations between the public broadcaster and the community radio sector are not always positive and cooperative. For instance, instead of seeing the community sector as a competitor for adspend and listeners, the SABC should regard community radio stations as a valued source of local news and local cultural creativity.

THE UNIQUENESS OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN SOUTH AFRICA



A REGULATED VOICE

South Africa is blessed with a democratic communication resource: community radio. Soon after the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa joined the worldwide family of community radio. One of the new government's first actions was to dismantle the state broadcaster, the SABC, which had been the mouthpiece of the apartheid regime for so many years.

A voice for the people

Many other governments in different parts of the world have feared giving a voice to the people through community radio. In fact, the National Party not only regulated, but also controlled, all broadcasting. It prescribed what may be broadcast on the news bulletins (it is said there was a hotline from PW Botha's study to the SABC television newsroom and many news presenters had to hastily apologise for an item that had offended the President!). No wonder that the National Party never thought much about community radio. It would have been too dangerous a tool for giving a voice to the people!

The new democratic government, however, introduced a three-tier broadcasting system:

Community radio stations

About 120 of them scattered
throughout South Africa

Commercial Sector

For example, 5fm, Highveld, Khaya FM,
Classic FM, Radio Algoa, 702
Television: e-tv and M-Net

Public Broadcaster

SABC's seven language radio stations
Television: SABC 1, SABC 2 and SABC 3

So community radio, with all its rights and obligations, was formally recognised as being part of the media landscape by the state. This status is important and quite unique. That is why everyone involved in community radio must be aware of the sectors' rights and obligations.

Challenging restrictions

Community radio stations must challenge restrictions in order to survive and thrive. The sector should not blindly accept that what was valid in 1990 at the 'Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves' conference is still valid today. Rules and regulations should be tested against South Africa's evolving political, social and economic development.

In the same way that the ANC did a U-turn from the nationalisation of economic assets to globalisation, the basis of the economic survival of the community radio sector might have to be rethought. For instance, if the present non-profit status of community radio endangers the survival of the sector, another financial structure might have to be found.

How does our community radio differ from others?

Not all community radio systems are alike and they can, in fact, differ widely from region to region throughout the world.

- In Europe (where community radio is often referred to as 'local radio'), it is inclined to be the voice of progressive or fringe artistic groups, of minority cultural, language and political interest groups. You may also find that gay-rights activists, environmentalists, and indigenous cultures gravitate to local radio.
- In Latin America, where community radio can rightly claim to have been born, it is more likely to have a strong educational and developmental aim, supported by the Catholic Church. Many stations are multimedia centres that support their broadcast programmes with printed material, posters and theatre presentations.
- In Africa, where community radio is slowly being permitted by more and more countries, it usually has a mixed developmental and civic function.

BUILDING DEMOCRACY

South Africa is fortunate in that community radio is considered one of the building blocks of the new democracy. From the very beginning, the state encouraged applications from communities for the establishment of community

radio stations. To date, some 120 community radio licences have been issued to approved and appropriate community applicants.

The nature and function of this sector is regulated (but not controlled!) by the state. Even though some people might disagree with the bureaucratic nature of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and its predecessor, the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA), it is essential for the proper functioning of the sector.

The most important factor is that the sector is taken seriously and no longer falls under the power of politicians. No office-bearers of political parties may serve as trustees or board members of a community station. This is to protect the independence of the station and the freedom of speech clauses in the Bill of Rights.

COMMUNITY RADIO IS PARTICIPATORY

Community radio is essentially democratic. The main idea is that it should be broadcast by the community, not to or for the community. But the problem is that many people say this without understanding how radio works. It's like saying, 'The people shall govern!' There is nothing wrong with the idea, but it takes a lot of planning, strategising and training to carry out.

Putting the community first

ICASA regulations aim to ensure that community needs are put first. It lays down certain strict rules to try to ensure participation by the community. Sometimes, these seem rather unrealistic. One example is the regulation that the newsroom should have a community committee that advises on the content and nature of the news that is broadcast. This almost always proves to be impractical as the knowledge and training of what makes news is not always readily available in the communities. Yet it is still important that we have these regulations to ensure that community radio stations are putting the needs of their communities first.

So we need to find a more practical, professional way to honour the intention of participation. For instance, in terms of the news, the first thing that has to happen is that every reporter must know how the community works, who the stakeholders and opinion-formers are and who makes the decisions. Professional community journalism training should teach reporters:

- how local government functions
- how to find out what the main civic issues are
- how to reach the appropriate community leaders.

At the same time, programme managers should be shown how to include community groups (such as the local rate-payers association) in discussion programmes, or even give them airtime to run their own interest programmes. Listeners' clubs are a very effective way of making sure that everyone has a say in the content of programming.

FAST FORWARD ➤➤

For more information on listeners' clubs and community participation, see chapters 3 and 6 on pages 32 and 88.

Know who's who in the zoo!

Other community radio programme portfolios – such as youth, women, sport and health – are also meant to have advisory community committees. Again, this is almost impossible to carry out on a day-to-day basis. But it should be possible to keep a checklist of local councillors, civic leaders, opinion-formers and stakeholders who can be approached for either comment or advice. That means knowing who's who in the zoo! So, even though this regulation is not always practically observed, it is an ideal that must be kept in mind by the programme managers and the news desk.

OPERATING LIKE A PUBLIC-SERVICE BROADCASTER

In spite of many problems (like under-financing and under-capacity), most South African community radio stations provide a service equivalent to an alternative public broadcasting service.

KEEP IT LEGAL!

Because the sector is obliged by ICASA to provide informational programmes like local news, health programmes, and environmental information, as well as cultural and educational information through its developmental programmes, it finds itself inevitably acting as an informal public broadcaster.

Community radio stations find themselves serving all the minority cultures and languages, and, theoretically, meeting the educational, developmental and cultural needs of their varied audience. Unfortunately, it is still 'theoretical' because the sector lacks capacity. This is because it is under-financed and does not enjoy the benefits of a substantial commercial income, public-service licence fees, state subsidies and VAT exemption enjoyed by the formal public broadcaster, the SABC.

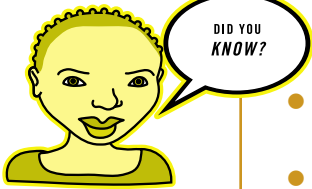
Adding value

However, once more community radio stations start to move towards sustainability and greater capacity for finding news and producing programmes, they could increasingly support and complement the programming of the SABC, thus adding value to the service. The community radio sector could, therefore, prove its value as a source of news, information and culture to the public broadcaster. All community newsrooms across South Africa can provide the public broadcaster with a wealth – and variety – of local news it could never otherwise access. As more and more community stations have production facilities, they can create drama, poetry and music programmes that represent all the cultures of South Africa, and these could then be accessed by the SABC. So, one looks forward to the day that the SABC no longer sees the community radio sector as a competitor, but as a worthy partner that will help fulfil its public broadcasting role. But for this to happen it will need all the lobbying abilities of the *National Community Radio Forum (NCRF)* (➤➤ see page 107) and other media NGOs.



CHANGING COMMUNITIES

Community radio can even change the behaviour of its communities. Research and educational organisations, such as `Soul City`, that monitor the reception of programmes, have proved that effective educational radio programmes can indeed change listeners' behaviour and lead to the growth of knowledge in the community. The most effective educational programmes are those that tell a story and have characters who people recognise.



DID YOU KNOW?

Community radio has a very high success rate in educational programming. This is because:

- There is a high degree of listener loyalty and the community audience is willing to trust the presenters they know.
- The station is accessible and people can either telephone in or just walk in if they need more information about a programme that has been broadcast.
- Most community stations are aware of local needs and language requirements, so they can adapt programmes to suit their audiences. A station can, for example, broadcast the telephone numbers of legal-aid centres or any other community help centres.
- Stations can enrich the learning that takes place with educational programmes – by running essay competitions for schools that are linked to the programmes, for example.

THE VOICE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Develop a proper functioning, sustainable station

The first task of management is to make sure the radio station is functioning properly, with high-quality programming and sustainable income that can pay for all the staff.

Give your community political clout

The next task is to draw on all the resources of the community, to support Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and civics, and to provide a voice for all the community groups (such as women, culture groups, rate-payers and the youth, for example). This will help transform communities, create employment, relieve poverty and give the community a political voice. Specifically because community radio is rooted in a community, it can help develop civil society and be the voice of that society, encouraging ideas of citizenship and social capital.

civics
CBOs working
with local
government

FAST FORWARD

Read Chapter 2 for more on CBOs and civics.

INTERACTIVE RADIO!

The advantage of community radio is that it's always there, always within reach. Unlike commercial broadcast media, community radio is highly interactive. Some commercial radio and public radio stations have a few regular chat shows that rely heavily on personalities. But community stations usually have an 'open-door' policy so that listeners can always reach the presenters. The on-air studio is always accessible by telephone, and when listeners do not have telephones, they may drop by the station to talk to the broadcasters or leave a postcard message.

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR!

Most community stations are situated in areas where they are highly visible and easily reached, so that a mother whose small child has been lost can dash into the station and put out a call for neighbours to look out for the child.

I remember being at ALX FM one day during a youth music dedication programme. Suddenly, a very upset mother rushed into the studio. She had lost her two-year-old son near the corner of Selborne and Eight. The presenter just kept her mike open and told the audience to keep listening.

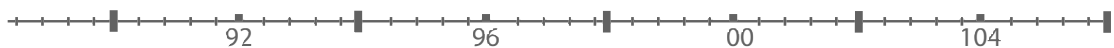
'What was he wearing?' asked the presenter.

'He was wearing a blue jersey and his little white Coca-Cola cap,' the mother replied.

'OK, listeners,' said the presenter, 'Have a good look round and help this mother!' Within 10 minutes a lady brought the little boy into the studio. That is why they say that a community radio station should have an 'open-door' policy. But take care! Only open the door to friends in need.

This sort of participation is something that television cannot do, and even public and commercial radio can only do occasionally.

THE QUESTION OF MONEY



Community radio in South Africa comprises the 100 or so low-power transmitters operated under licence from the *Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)* (➤➤ see page 107). Licences are usually given to a geographical community, which can vary from a densely populated township of a few square kilometres, or a rural community spread out over a few hundred square kilometres. Sometimes a community of interest, such as a religious organisation or an organisation for the disabled, may also apply for a licence.

IT'S NOT ABOUT PROFIT

Profit is not the main idea behind the station. Community stations are run non-commercially as trusts, charitable organisations or Section 21 companies. There has been a lot of confusion about what this actually means. Many people think that ICASA insists that no community radio station should be allowed to 'make money' or 'show profits'. But this is not true. What is meant is that a community radio station should not regard being commercial and making a lot of money as more important than serving the community.

When the original legislation was passed, it was probably thought that the state would assist the community radio sector financially – possibly through what was then the *Independent Media Diversity Trust (IMDT)*, or contractual relationships with the Department of Communications or even through a smart relationship with the SABC. But none of that ever happened. Apart from substantial assistance from donor agencies such as the *Open Society Foundation*, (➤➤ see page 107) or NGOs like ABC Ulwazi (➤➤ see page 107) (which has provided over R3 million in study bursaries), the sector has been left to fend for itself.

New legislation, in the form of the *Media Development and Diversity Act (MDDA)* (➤➤ see page 107) in 2003, again promises some assistance to the sector but it is still unclear how this might happen.

This brings us back to what it actually means to be a non-profit organisation. Put simply, it means that you may not have shareholders, and therefore cannot distribute any profits to them. Some people think that it is better to call it a ‘not-for-profit’ organisation. That means that profit is not the main idea behind the station.

Making money

But because a community radio station is a non-profit organisation does not mean that it may not make money!

The money that your station has in hand after paying its real expenses (such as the telephone bill or the rent) may be spent on other aspects relating to the running of a radio station. This may, for example, include:

- paying the station staff a living salary
- paying volunteers a stipend to cover travel and food
- sponsoring a community event, such as a jazz weekend or soccer festival
- improving or upgrading the station’s equipment, or buying CDs.

stipend

small fee that is not a regular salary

The money should, therefore, be spent on improving the service to the community and relations with the community.

Generally, a community station that has at least some money to start with is always able to make some more. For example, a station in KwaZulu-Natal, which receives a subsidy from a church organisation, uses this subsidy to create even more income. This happens because management can now afford to hire a marketing manager, pay her travel expenses, make telephone calls and print attractive brochures. This all helps to motivate staff and encourage loyalty, and also attracts sponsors and advertisers.

FAST FORWARD ➤➤

Chapter 6 on sustainability and Chapter 3 on marketing have more suggestions and tips.



Nokuphila FM update!

Nokuphila FM is a fictional radio station, and although it doesn't really exist, it helps to illustrate practical 'slices of life' in the sector.

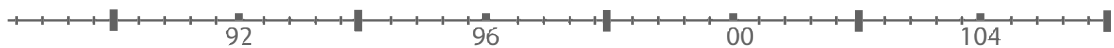
Three years ago, Nokuphila FM found that it had no more cash. The reasons for this were simple: the small amount of donor funding and support from the Open Society Foundation and a European country had slowly run out. Nobody had thought to plan for a time when there would be no more money.

The telephone was then cut off. But a community station without a telephone is like a deep-sea diver without oxygen – the station had been cut off from its lifeblood. The fax paper also ran out. Then the station manager started spending too much time on his own business and could not put together a business plan. The marketing manager did not have money to take a taxi to local businesses. The rent could not be paid and volunteers had to pay for their own transport and lunch.

Luckily, another donor offered to help, and set up a community tourism scheme, whereby the station would broadcast information programmes, recruit young entrepreneurs and run regular jazz concerts to publicise the scheme. The 'seed money' provided by the donor managed to pay the rent and the outstanding accounts, and the marketing manager was given a budget and a deadline to generate advertising. Because of the community tourism programmes, the entire community became aware of the scheme and local businesses bought advertising spots.

Soon Nokuphila FM gained more sponsorships and the station was making its way. All it needed was the 'seed money' and sensible planning.

THE BASIC STRUCTURES OF COMMUNITY RADIO



A typical community radio station will probably have a permanent staff of three or four people:

- a station manager
- a programme manager
- a marketing manager
- a news and actuality editor.

The **station manager** oversees the running of the entire station. The **programme manager** and the marketing manager report to the station manager.

Reporting to the programme manager would be the people in charge of the youth programmes, the financial programmes, the women's programmes, the community programmes and the health programmes.

Two categories of workers report to the **marketing manager**:

- those responsible for selling airtime according to the rate card (➤➤ see page 117 for an example of a rate card). These are the salespeople and their work brings in income for the station.
- those responsible for marketing the station. They may also be known as the public relations officers.

rate card
radio station's
scale of
advertising
rates

Reporting to the **news department editor** are all the reporters, with their different `beats`: the crime reporter, the education reporter, the health and environment reporter, the municipal affairs reporter and so on.

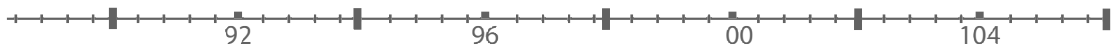
Then there may also be **volunteers**. They are an indispensable part of the station. They provide a direct link with the community; they become involved in acquiring a skill (which is especially important in an area where there is a high rate of unemployment); and create a pool of talent from which the station manager can draw when a permanent member of staff leaves.

Finally, we should not forget that a well-run community station is a small business, so there must be a competent **bookkeeper** who can manage the income and expenditure records, the petty cash, the salaries, the PAYE system, the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) payments, etc. He/she must also keep records of all donations or funding so that a report can be made to the funders or donors. There is often a retired or retrenched bookkeeper in a community that can do the station's books.

FAST FORWARD ➔➔

All these key functions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

WHY IS IT CALLED 'COMMUNITY RADIO'?



THINK ABOUT IT!

This might seem a silly question – because we all think we know what community radio is.

- But is the name simply short for `regional´ or `local´ radio, as they call it in other parts of the world?
- If so, why don't we simply call it `local´ radio?
- Does the term `community radio´ have any added associations for you?

A TOOL FOR UPLIFTMENT

Community radio was created as an empowerment tool to uplift the community. The concept of `community radio´ has strong political and liberation undertones. The `Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves´ conference in the Netherlands in 1991 proposed the following:

A national community broadcasting sector should be participatory; it should be owned and controlled by the community itself, and the broadcasting content should be determined by the needs of the community as perceived by that community.

This means that the sector was created by the new democratic government as an empowerment tool specifically to uplift the community. As we've said, it is essentially broadcasting **by** the community, rather than **for** the community. It is the voice of those parts of civil society that have the interests of the community at heart. None of these concepts are relevant to the term `local radio´.

COMMUNITY RADIOS NEED TO FORGE THEIR OWN COMMUNITY

How big is a 'community'?

We should be careful not to use the word 'community' too easily or too idealistically, and assume that everyone knows what a community is. After all, a 'community' may mean 'the broad European Community' or a small Khoisan community in the Kalahari. In fact, if you think about it, society is made up of:

- individuals
- families (tied by blood relationships)
- gangs (individuals united against organised social behaviour)
- crowds (individuals united by momentary interests, such as an accident or a strike)
- groups (united for longer, non-permanent periods for a particular interest, such as saving a national monument)
- parties (a group permanently united for political purposes)
- communities (interest groups and individuals united permanently in a particular place, for mutual support and a common purpose).

Is being part of a community always a good thing?

We tend to think that a community is always positive or virtuous, so we tend to say: 'This is in the interests of the community.' But if we go back in history, we can see that violently antagonistic Protestant or Catholic groups in Northern Ireland are, for examples, communities, and so are gangsters or criminal groups on the Cape Flats.

In Africa, particularly, the idea of community is problematic. On a large scale, there have been attempts to create broad-based communities that would overcome national boundaries. These have included the failed East African Community and the rather ineffective OAU. Even today there are problems associated with the African Union, which was recently established.

The biggest problem is that large-scale unions tend to play down differences in language, culture and political beliefs and, in so doing, ignore the opinions and interests of the broad band of citizens that make up civil society.

OAU
Organisation of
African Unity

Do rural and urban 'communities' differ?

Historically, Africans are most acutely aware of the smaller community in which they physically live, which involves a great deal of social interaction. This usually results in a core of common basic beliefs and common institutions. Traditionally, it is in a rural community that Africans bury their elders, build their huts, and bear their children.

But, increasingly, these rural communities are relocating to informal settlements in urban areas, as poverty and unemployment force families off the land. This means new institutions and allegiances must be found to make up a community. As a result, ratepayers' organisations, sports teams, women's groups, stokvels, parent-teacher associations and political parties create new interest groups.

This is where community radio has such an important role to play. In the beginning, there is seldom an obvious group called 'the community' represented by the radio station in both rural and urban areas. This is especially true of South Africa, which is still struggling to throw off the legacy of racism and intolerance.

How do you create a unified community?

Initially, a number of different **`interest groups`** come together to apply for a licence: for example, ratepayers' associations, the sports committee and the women's committee. But the parts are often not the sum of the whole. The interest group is not the community, although it might hold the seeds of the community within it.

But once it has been granted a licence, a community radio station can **create a `community` where there was not one before**. It can pull the interest groups together through dialogue and debate.

Often, the granting of the licence is the first step in creating the basis for a **`community`**. It is not the other way round.

Creating communities

Dialogue, debate and crises help create communities. Often only during a crisis, such as a war or a natural disaster, do all the interest groups come together to form one community. We all remember images of the community that was created in New York by the 9/11 disaster. Or of women protesting in front of a courtroom in South Africa against the granting of bail to a suspected child rapist. These are communities that have been brought together temporarily by a crisis, but then disperse into a mass of individuals again.

But community radio can change that. The major community-creating tool of a community radio is that unique resource: its interactivity. Stations command great loyalty, and presenters are generally well known within the community. Those citizens who have access to telephones can, for example, participate interactively in phone-ins, and this results in a community that is able to enter into dialogue with itself. When there are no telephones, locals walk into the station as part of an **`open-door`** policy and take part in discussion programmes, or drop off comments in a convenient posting box.

After a time, this results in the recognition of similar voices and dialogue and thus a community is created.



These are the building blocks of a community. Remember these four words, because we examine them in greater detail when we discuss the role community radio can play in rebuilding civil society.



CHECKLIST

Rate your station's sensitivity to your community.

Is your community radio station:

- Participatory? In what way?
- Interactive? In what way?
- How is it different to a commercial station?
- How is it different to the SABC?
- How has it changed the life of one person? Of a group?
- Do you believe your station can generate income? How?
- How many groups are there in your community? Do you speak to all of them in your programming? Which one/s do you tend to focus on more?



WRAP UP!

Community radio stations have a function that sets them apart from commercial and public broadcasters. They are unique in that they are so close to the communities they serve, reflecting vital community issues and focusing specifically on their needs. Community stations need to work towards creating a civil society with a growing sense of community values.

But at the same time, the sector must also realise that just as community stations are the pulse of their community, so the community is its lifeblood, and needs to be fully a part of it to allow the station to grow.