

Listeners from rural areas to make their voices heard



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Once "forgotten", "neglected" and marginalised", listeners from rural areas who tune to radio stations such as SAFM, RSG, CKI, Umhlobo Wenene, Thobela, Phalaphala, Munghana Lonene, Ligwalagwala, Motswedding, XKFM, Lesedi, Ukhozi, Lotus, and Ikwekwezi, will now be able to make their voices heard when the new SABC additions and changes are implemented next week.

A whole range of weekend news and current affairs programmes is set to systematically increase rural coverage in the form of interesting features whereby people will be able to voice their complaints about critical issues facing their communities.

The contents will include breaking news; hourly full bulletin news; comprehensive weather reports; reviews of stories that made headlines during the week; sports preview and debates; economic, health and science stories for the week; world news with special focus on Africa; and special local features focusing on rural issues during which guests respond to questions raised by listeners through emails, phone calls and letters, and many more.

"Our radio footprint is far reaching and is the main source of information and entertainment for our rural areas," Snuki Zikalala, SABC News and Current Affairs Managing Director, said.

"The new radio current affairs shows will air on all Public Broadcasting Services on the weekend. These programmes will be the platform for the voiceless rural communities to expose their unique and interesting stories and their way of life to every home, a service we are all proud of."

Zikalala was speaking at the SABC launch of new additions and changes on its news and current affairs which took place at the Sandton Convention Centre on March 16, 2006 in Johannesburg.

20 million listeners

Over the years, radio has become the most universal of all mass media, reaching large audiences - young and old - even in remote, underdeveloped and impoverished places. In the absence of television signals, radio has proven to be a powerful and vital mean of entertainment and communication, providing rural communities with up-to-date local and national news in their own language and various types of music. Recent research shows that SABC radio stations reach at least 20 million people per day compared to 6 million viewers watching its three television stations daily.

But it is sometimes counter-productive to focus on how many people listen to which radio stations if the programmes not

only lack quality and inspiration, but do not cater for listeners' needs and do not give them a chance to express themselves freely. These shortcomings are mostly the result of bad planning and unskilled presenters and deejays - something SABC Group CEO Advocate Dali Mpofu said needs to be rectified by increasing the "professionalisation" of the organisation.

The perception that the voice of rural communities in building the nation matters as much as that of those living in cities could be the motive behind the public broadcaster's decision to take what can be said as a huge step towards captivating, educating and informing the minds of all South Africans regardless of their race, social class and culture.

Serious issues

There are serious issues affecting rural communities and those who are familiar with these surroundings know better than anyone what it is like to live in there.

Interestingly so, many delegates interviewed at the launch said that these adjustments will in many ways improve the lives of these communities and boost their understanding of the country's social, political and economic problems.

Asked why it took so long to equip rural communities with such a viable tool after more than a decade since the dawn of democracy, Zikalala said: "Financial constraints were preventing us from realising this dream. But since we now feel that we are financially strong, we have decided to plough that money back to the communities by equipping them to be well informed about developments taking place in their area. Hopefully they will have a say on the day-to-day affairs of their communities."

He also said that the SABC Radio news provides citizens with the information they need to be free. "The introduction of these weekend and people-oriented programmes will enhance that vision and strengthen SABC News so that it becomes an invaluable institution in our country and the world and helps serve the public's right to know."

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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