PARLIAMENTARY INDABA: TRANSFORMATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRINT MEDIA

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ABOUT MMA

Formerly the Media Monitoring Project

- Vision:
  
  A responsible media that enables an informed and engaged citizenry in Africa and across the world.

Promoting Human Rights and Democracy through the media since 1993
MORE ABOUT MMA

- Human rights NGO monitoring the media since 1993 – celebrating 18 years;
- Conducted over 120 media monitoring projects:
  - Race (SAHRC, CSVR), Elections;
  - Gender (GMBS, GMMP);
  - Children (ECM);
  - HIV (WITS, MAP), and more!
MMA & SUBMISSIONS

- Impact media policy, submissions:
  - IBA and ICASA
    - Broadcasters Code of Conduct;
    - SABC Licence Conditions;
  - Elections report;
  - Disability code of conduct, and more!
  - Individual media, SABC Editorial Policies;
  - Press Council Review;
  - Parliamentary Committees;
    - Broadcasting Bills;
    - Advertising & Transformation Hearings;
MMA Bias and Assumptions

- MMA work has Human Rights Bias;
- LOVE our Constitution;
- Print media and Government intend to do good;
- Public and citizen participation essential for democracy;
Starting Point

- 1994 to 2012
- Print media:

  - Self regulatory review – brutal, but positive;
  - Mvelaphanda deal - 100% Black ownership
Back to basics

- Why are we really bothering with print media?
  - Circulation figures indicate that with a few exceptions - Isolezwe, M&G – significant decrease in line with international trends;

- Matters for two key reasons:
  - It continues to set the agenda and opinions in our society – i.e. Very powerful
    - Often for good – Mldluli is most recent example
    - Also for bad – sometimes unethical coverage of children
  - Some see lots of value in it – Mvelaphanda, and Independent – until recently cash cow for UK;
The Elephant: To Charter or not to Charter

- To be clear: Transformation is essential – and huge pressure to ensure it happens;
- Understand transformation as being, “a wide field that covers ownership, distribution, content and the languages of publications.” (Press Freedom Commission P:61)
- Charter doesn’t cover all of these areas
- Crucially no evidence will improve quality of media;
- Media special – cannot simply ignore concerns;
- Also tend to favour an elite;
- Transformation essential in number of core areas – charter for print inappropriate – much broader
Transformation: shades of grey

- Needs to be simultaneous across many areas;
- Also on different levels – newsrooms significantly transformed in terms of race – not so much gender – But lots of variance;
- Across scale of media – different from big four to small commercial;
- What’s our vision of transformed media?
- That all people in South Africa are able to receive a diverse range of media and where they are able to receive and impart stories about them and their experiences.
Where are we now?

- Need to acknowledge that big, niche, small commercial and community media offer a great deal. Certainly if middle class there is great diversity of media and platforms available;

- While limited this is amazing achievement – and should be celebrated – better than many countries;

- **BUT:** Where is diversity when talk about rural and the poor?
  - SABC: most accessible – also fantastic – but hardly constitutes diversity;
  - Under resourced community media sector;
Real transformation

- Most optimal option is Fast Cheap Broadband (FCB) for all;
- Then people can choose for themselves AND;
- Right to Receive and IMPART information;
- Digital changed not only means of delivery of media but also makes communication with audiences essential;
- If FCB there and news and content that people want isn't – they can create for themselves;
- Value FCB is recognised by Government – most recently at ICT Conference. (Although dominance of big players suggests for wealthy only);
Real transformation

- Benefits of FCB are clear:
  - Economic development;
  - Skills development;
  - Empowered citizens and MORE;

- Fundamental to our democracy that it is a national priority;

- BUT significant difficulties:

- Good news it is happening – albeit slowly;
- Appears to follow similar class bias – middle and upper, not the poor or outside metropoles;
FCB: Fast Cheap Broadband

- Temptation to challenge roll out by supporting smaller new players – but just set them up to fail;
- While behemoths guilty of all manner of evils – e.g. expensive calls unintelligible packages – leave Steven Hawkins baffled;
- They do have skills, resources, capacity and infrastructure to “monetise the poorer markets”.
- Counter intuitive response to begin with – to allow them to get even bigger to realise FCB all over SA.
FCB: Fast Cheap Broadband

- If accept value of FCB need to talk about real transformation in telecoms and ICT as well – which goes well beyond print;
- But print still supplies content – so crucial to ensuring real transformation;
- ICT Charter just come into effect – and codes should be supported by all;
- BUT need other aspects to change simultaneously for real transformation;
- All to receive and impart own ideas, stories etc;
Conclusion

- Come back to FCB and skills development;
- As well as diversity of content sources – so all can choose – role of community media crucial in this;
- At same time need real support and development of Community sector MDDA huge role here!
- Cannot achieve real transformation with limited focus on ownership and print;
- If people not happy big companies will be forced to change content – that’s real sustainable transformation, from the people by the people;
Thank you

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