

Address at the MTN Radio Awards 2012

By Lumko Mtimde, issued by Media Development and Diversity Agency

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), proclaimed the 13th February as an occasion to draw attention to the unique value of radio, which remains the medium to reach the widest audience and is currently taking up new technological forms and devices. South Africa has undergone profound political and economic transformation over the last 17 years, resulting in new and strong political institutions that underpin democracy and a macro economic framework that encourages greater freedom and competition.

These MTN Radio Awards take place as SA is celebrating 75 years of SABC Radio, 19 years of Community Radio, 50 years of Radio Freedom and more than 19 years of commercial radio. We now, since 1994, in terms of the law have public, commercial/private and community radio services, as an attempt to achieve plurality of voices and media diversity.

Radio continues to play a significant role in helping people in all their diversity to communicate with each other in order to strengthen our democracy, promote a culture of human rights and enable all to participate fully in our economic growth and speed up transformation and development. Radio is even more important in SA, where the rate of illiteracy is reported to stand at around 18% of adults over 15 years old (about 9-million adults are not functionally literate). Radio reaches almost every corner of our country, rural, peri-urban and urban. Radio has informed, educated and entertained our citizens even during the apartheid days, Radio Freedom and community radio (through cassettes, campaigns, etc.) continued to empower citizens with alternative information.

Information is knowledge and power. Community radio is a new and credible audience delivery platform in respect of community needs, and has redefined the South African media landscape. The distinctive features that defined community radio include four most critical elements which are: reachable, relevant, reasonable and reliable in its access to under explored markets, through its unconventional approach to programming, breaking media access boundaries and demystifying the platforms to make them a bit more flavored with local nuances for maximum impact.

Since 1999 community radio audiences have grown steadily from two million listeners cum over seven days to 8.5 million listeners cum over seven days in 2011. This is a phenomenal increase given the limited resources that many of these stations have. This growth can only be attributed to the relevant content of the platform, the intimacy of the platform with its audiences and the reliability and trust that has been established between the stations and their audiences. This is the critical ingredient to the success of any community radio station.

The stations not only deliver audiences, but also deliver markets with disposable income. Research shows that LSM 1-6 spends over 80% of its income on food stuff and transportation. Social income (SASSA grants) has gone some distance to alleviate poverty and improve quality of life. These improvements in the standards of living are an indication of a society in transition, and one that community radio has intertwined itself within it. This transition is also reflective in the consumer purchasing behavior and lifestyle choices of modern consumers coupled with increase in the demand for locally relevant content produced and delivered in local languages.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that Community Radio has become and will continue to be a reservoir of talent for the public and commercial radio. The ongoing training and capacity building programs supported by the MDDA are a major contributor to this revolving door of talent. The MDDA has trained over 1400 community radio managers through a variety of programs in partnership with institutions of higher learning and industry training bodies. This sector has a distinctive and critical role to play in unearthing, molding and passing on the talent to the industry, and in return the industry needs to continue to support the development of the sector through partnerships and collaborations like the MDDA. Community radio takes credit in the discovery of numerous radio icons that are not only leading on air talent but have become captains of our industry. This ongoing symbiotic relationship needs to be protected because it makes good business sense.

Every citizen irrespective of their social class, (where ever located, rural or urban, poor or rich) should have access to a choice of a diverse range of media. Access to communication and information empowers citizens, facilitates participatory democracy, and assists in defending, advancing and deepening our democracy.

In order to sustain our democracy, we need to reflect honestly and commit to reforming the media industry so that it is diverse and provides diverse information. Diversity is largely about responsible voices making themselves heard across the political and social spectrum. The diversity of the media (in respect of all the elements from ownership to content) is imperative if our democracy is to shine. The broadcast media has come a long way since democracy, right along the value chain from ownership to control. Tune into radio and television today, and you will hear and see content reflective of all our cultures and languages. Certainly through radio, we contributed a great deal to the creation of an enabling environment for media development and diversity. Radio today faces new opportunities brought in by internet radio, digital radio, mobile radio, satellite radio, etc. These new platforms present new business models for a successful radio and require more investment in skills development.

Let us join through the MTN Radio Awards celebrate excellence and innovation in radio broadcast, improve international cooperation among radio broadcasters and encourage decision-makers to create and provide access to information through radio, including community radios. Congratulations to all the winners and runners up, we are looking forward to many years of excellence in radio.

I thank you

Lumko Mtimde

Chief Executive Officer

Media Development and Diversity Agency

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▪ **MDDA-Sanlam Local Media Awards entries for 2014 now open** 26 Nov 2014

▪ **Entries open for MDDA-Sanlam Local Media Awards** 25 Nov 2014

▪ **Mandla Langa acknowledges 20 years of media freedom and diversity** 28 May 2014

▪ **MDDA-Sanlam Local Media Awards winners announced** 27 May 2014

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