

Community radio takes on gender, world cup

By [Deborah Walter](#)

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The world's media eyes will soon squarely focus on South Africa, with millions from across the globe tuning in via multimillion-dollar broadcasts. Yet even as the international media and big broadcasters move in and journalists descend from all over the world, in SA, like much of Africa, community radio is still a key source of information and news for many communities, linking local activities and issues with international perspectives.



Celia Dube speaks as Brenda Leonard, left, and Nomasonto Magwaza, right, look on.

While other news media, especially print, struggle to keep audiences, community radio listenership in SA is continuously rising. According to the [South African Advertising Research Foundation](#) (SAARF), community radio is improving its weekly reach, rising from 7.340 million listeners to 7.713 million between February and May this year alone.

Contributing factors

One of the contributing factors cited is the increasing listenership among youth and women. Perhaps it is because, although we live in an increasingly globalised world, audiences still crave community issues and information relevant to their everyday lives.

Community radio is often more likely than mainstream media to include voices from community-based sources, and women sources. For example, monitoring of community media by Gender Links during the April 2009 elections showed that women constituted 34% of news sources, compared to 20% in monitoring of the mainstream media conducted by Media Monitoring Africa over the same period

In celebration of [World Press Freedom Day](#) on 3 May, Gender Links, SA's National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) and the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) conducted a debate to tackle the convergence of these issues - community media, gender, and the upcoming 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Many creative ways

According to NCRF director Franklin Huizies, while community stations may not have the much sought-after and very expensive broadcast rights, there's many creative ways to make sure local listeners get in on the world cup action. "How can we take advantage of the world cup?" Huizies challenged the audience comprising mostly of community broadcasters.

“Stations can do live broadcasts from unofficial fan parks, cover other activities around the tournament, and even teach their communities to speak the greetings of the incoming visitors,” suggested Huizies.

Brenda Leonard of Bush Radio echoed these thoughts, explaining that Bush's strong commitment to gender equality and ensuring the participation of women means they often get the interesting stories that everyone else misses. For example, an all-woman work force was responsible for installing the Cape Town stadium's beautiful and complex glass ceiling, a story that Bush sought out to cover.

Strategy already in place

Human trafficking and possible dangers to children during the event has been a serious source of concern for the government and parents. Even before the advent of the cup, Bush has had a strategy in place to deal with such emergencies.

“We have a policy that if anyone goes missing, at any time, any programme is immediately stopped and that information goes out on air,” explained Leonard. “The first four hours are the most crucial, so the information is urgent.”

According to Leonard, community radio's job is also to tackle the big issues and what's gone wrong. She explained that one of the stories Bush has followed closely is the displacement of informal traders, often resulting from strict FIFA by-laws about where business can take place in and around stadiums.

“All the traders are gone,” she said. “We need to talk about where they are now.”

One such trader is Cecilia Dube, who was part of the crew of women that provided refreshments for workers during the construction at Soccer City outside of Johannesburg. Dube is frustrated with media, recalling many interviews that did nothing to stop the forcible removal of her and her colleagues from spaces they occupied for four years.

Adding insult to injury

For Dube, the displacement is bad enough, but adding insult to injury is the lack of recognition of the vital role such traders played. “I may not have touched a brick on that stadium,” she said, “but I helped to build it. Without me and other traders, those workers would have had to travel far for food, and the job would not have been done.”

She wondered why all of the advertisements and television programmes have missed talking about the contribution of such women.

Dube remembered sadly that she was “one of the people who jumped sky high” at the announcement of SA as host. She puzzled at why the traders are suddenly deemed “unsightly” and unwanted by the Government.

“They forget that many doctors and lawyers were raised on the earnings of such traders,” she pointed out. “Many traders are women who are the only breadwinners in the family, and losing their income means no food or clothes for their children.”

Most disappointed

Dube says the traders, or as she prefers, small business operators, are most disappointed because many thought the world cup would mean the much-needed capital to become formalised. “Provide us with an office and capital and we'll show you

how informal we are,” she challenged.

According to Nomasonto Magwaza, programme coordinator at ESSET, the displacement has not yet ended. “We have heard that traders from Bree Mall have now been told to leave. On 21 March, traders were forcibly removed from Park Station,” she said. “Yet renovations slated to begin 1 May have not yet started, and traders are asking why.”

This kind of displacement has not received widespread coverage in the media, and there is a certain reticence to “spoiling the party”, yet, as those present at the debate discussed, it is important to highlight the good stories, while pointing out what needs to be done differently for any future events, anywhere on the continent

As Kubi Rama, deputy Director of Gender Links, pointed out, “it is the voices of the Cecilia Dubes across the country that we need to hear.” She recalled the recent incident where security barred a female *Sowetan* photographer Vathiswa Ruselo from entering a section of Orlando Stadium, stating that “You are a woman. Women have their places and that is where you belong.” Rama questioned, “What does this mean for overage of the world cup?”

Leaves a gap

For community radio, the need to cover these stories leaves a gap. “Most community radio constituents are those who cannot afford tickets,” said Rama. “These are the most important people to ensure access to coverage.”

Even without the big broadcast rights, community radio is sure to be at the centre of the action. For the hosts of the debate there was renewed commitment to ensure that community voices, especially those of women, are among those heard during all of the festivities. They agreed that while they can’t change the rules of the world cup, they can help raise the voice of public opinion, making every voice count during the world cup and beyond.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Walter is the editor of the Gender Links (GL) Opinion and Commentary Service (www.genderlinks.org.za) and director of QMFD Productions. Email her at editor@genderlinks.org.za.

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