

The localisation of the SABC is long overdue

By [Akhasei Shilubane Mukoma](#)

12 Jul 2016

The SABC public broadcasting mandate must evolve with the changing needs of its viewers and listeners. The imminent changes to SABC TV channels programming line-up, particularly the increase of local content quotas to eighty percent is long overdue and in line with the objectives of the Electronic Communications Act, Local Content Regulations and SABC ICASA License Conditions. The six hundred million set aside by SABC for local content development will make a huge economic impact in the short to medium term.

The SABC is under increasing pressure from Mzansi Magic to increase its local content offering. *Isibaya*, *Igazi*, *Our perfect Wedding*, *Date my Family* are just some of few Mzansi Magic programmes that are eating away SABC TV viewership and advertising pie share. The increase of local content on SABC TV is not necessarily being implemented for the sole reason of empowering local producers; the public broadcaster has to defend its dominance in the broadcasting market.

Mzansi Magic dominates the airwaves on Sunday evenings with its compelling and addictive programmes, partly due to Basetsana Khumalo produced content. In the advent of democracy, SABC used to be the exclusive broadcaster producing African languages content; however Mzansi Magic and Mzansi Wethu disrupted the market when they introduced vernacular movies, lifestyle programmes and dramas.



123RF

Good, compelling content attracts audiences, listeners and advertising, and SABC is well familiar with this tact. In anticipation of the advent of DTT multiple channels by Mnet and e.tv, the SABC also has to up its game. *Generations*, *Muvhango*, and *Uzalo* are currently the most watched dramas on SABC TV and the other shows are not as successful in terms of audience ratings.

In terms of the ICASA TV Local Content Regulations, the public service channels, SABC 1 and SABC 2, are required by 2018 to have a minimum average of sixty five percent of local television content. These channels are also required to have the following genres, thirty five percent of South Africa drama, eighty percent South African current affairs, fifty percent South African documentaries, fifty percent South African knowledge building content, sixty percent educational content and fifty percent children programming. SABC 1 languages in terms of its ICASA License Conditions are Nguni and English. SABC 2 languages are Sesotho, Tshivenda, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga and Afrikaans.

With regards to the commercial channels of the SABC, SABC 3 is required by 2018 to have a minimum of forty five percent of its programming consisting of South African local content. The channel's local content must consist of the following genres, twenty percent of South African drama, fifty percent South African Current Affairs, thirty percent South African documentaries, thirty percent South African knowledge building content and twenty five percent children programming. SABC 3 principal language is English.

The SABC is also required by the ICASA Local Content Regulations to ensure that forty percent of the programming is produced by Independent Producers. The public broadcaster must also ensure that by 2018, fifty percent of its annual production budget is spent on African languages programmes and content produced outside Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. SABC has therefore indicated it will build production studios in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North-West to support regional production companies.

It is therefore critical to note that the changes that the SABC is introducing, even though earlier than required, these changes are within the regulatory intervention by the Regulator ICASA.

When ICASA introduced license conditions for SABC around 2003, the Regulator approved that SABC 3, Metro FM and 5 FM would constitute the commercial wing of the public broadcaster. SABC 1 and 2 and the rest of the SABC radio stations would constitute the public service wing. During the deliberations with the Regulator, submissions were made that SABC 3, Metro FM and 5 FM were to financially subsidise the public service stations through their advertising revenue. The submissions were made within the context that the SABC funding model consisted of advertising, license fees and some government funding. At that time government funding and license fees revenue were shrinking.

At the current moment, SABC 1, Ukhozi FM, Metro FM and 5 FM largely contribute revenue of the SABC. Therefore, the commercial wing business model has silently become obsolete. It is therefore not surprising that the local content quotas that the SABC is introducing across its radio and TV platforms seem to be shifting away from the requirements imposed by ICASA with regards to the commercial and the public service stations.

What becomes critical as the SABC introduces more South African local content on TV and its radio stations is to ensure that the local content creates social cohesion and at the same time ensures the viability and sustainability of the public broadcaster as a whole. One hopes that the SABC will continue to ensure that its programming is also informed by market research. Even though the SABC, particularly its public service stations are targeted at specific tribes, South Africa is gradually integrating and it becomes critical that content on SABC stations is not narrowly defined to be aimed at a particular tribe, for example a Mosotho speaking listener may opt to listen to Ukhozi FM. This mindset shift is more critical on SABC TV, as more South Africans are becoming multilingual. Phalaphala FM has an Afrikaans rugby presenter who speaks fluent Tshivenda for example.

The introduction of more South African content will always be controversial because international content will have to fall by the wayside. The European Commission is also grappling with a policy proposal to ensure that TV broadcasters,

particularly the VOD broadcasters in the European Union play more local content from Europe. The SABC has also announced that its bulletins must have the discretion and flexibility to diversify its news content due the current scenario wherein its bulletins are a cut and paste of each other.

The similarity of the news bulletins across SABC radio and television platforms reduces creativity and diversity of news. The SABC coverage area is South Africa and it becomes a complex exercise to have news that is relevant to all its viewers and listeners across all provinces. The SABC also has approval from ICASA for regional TV stations and one assumes SABC will introduce these stations during the DTT era that is upon us. As we go to the municipal elections different communities are anxious to see their local service delivery problems on TV and the SABC is a key broadcaster.

Note that Bizcommunity staff and management do not necessarily share the views of its contributors - the opinions and statements expressed herein are solely those of the author.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Avhasei Shilubane Mukoma is a Broadcasting and Telecoms Law Attorney.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>