

The role of community radios in information dissemination to rural women in South Africa

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Abstract

Rural women in South Africa are important role players in community development; to withhold information from them is to hold back the potential for rural development. However, obstacles such as poverty, illiteracy, fear, poor access to public agencies, and lack of knowledge about the right to information and how or where to ask for it has deprived women of access to information. Since post-apartheid South Africa, government has made progress toward empowering women. Community radio is the only accessible and readily affordable medium within the rural community and can play a significant role in rural development of women. This article adopts the case study research approach through the use of document analysis and interviews to investigate the role of two community radio stations in selected areas of the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa with regard to rural development and the dissemination of information to women listeners. It also suggests ways by which these radios may be used to enhance access to information by rural women in South Africa. The findings reveal that although community radio stations are recognised as support systems for information dissemination in rural communities, their role in information dissemination and the community development of women has not been fully explored. This article suggests ways in which the services of community radios may be enhanced by the provision of information to women for rural development.

Keywords

Communication, community development, community radios, information access, rural development, information dissemination, rural women, South Africa

Introduction

Rural women in South Africa are important role players in community development. To withhold information from them is to hold back the potential for rural development. Women play the triple role of the production, reproduction and socio-political involvement in society (Mulauzi and Sitali, 2010). However, obstacles such as poverty, illiteracy, fear, poor access to public agencies and lack of knowledge about the right to information and how or where to ask for it, have deprived women of access to information (Ellison and Pol, 2015). The plight of these women has hindered their access to media that would enable them to participate responsibly in nation building. Unlike men, rural women remain uninformed and they lack access to appropriate information that is critical to all aspects of their development (Mulauzi and Sitali, 2010). Therefore, information poverty remains

one of the causes of underdevelopment. Community radio is the only accessible and readily affordable medium within the rural community and can play a significant role in the development of rural women. It helps provide information and lends support to educating rural women in financially disadvantaged communities (Al-hassan et al., 2011). Furthermore, the programmes are cheap enough to be produced locally in a range of languages (Gatua et al., 2010). One of the recommendations by the Carter Center in Guatemala for gender

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equity in information access on International Women's Day 2015, was to increase the use of community radio as a means of effectively reaching women (Ellison and Pol, 2015). On this day, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), which is a roadmap for women's rights and equality that was signed in Guatemala with 188 other governments 20 years ago, was revisited. It underscored the importance of access to information for women in achieving such goals as improved health and economic empowerment through entrepreneurship. The prerequisite for most democracy theories is the idea that when a citizen is informed, he/she will be able and willing to take up challenges and to act upon them (Kivikuru, 2006). There is therefore an urgent need for women to access information and acquire knowledge for urgent decision-making. Receiving information while performing other activities, at home or at work, has proved to be convenient for women. Community radio stations are popular in rural communities that otherwise have a limited means of media communication and access to information. There are over 200 community radios in South Africa, yet the extent to which these radios contribute to improving access to information to rural women is underexplored.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the Government has made progress toward empowering women. In 2012 the country had 44% female representation in Parliament and 43% of cabinet ministers were women (Govender, 2012). The country's interest in women's issues is also evident from the fact that it has also ratified and signed a vast range of regional and international instruments that affirm the rights of women. Among these are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, the Africa Charter on Women and People's Rights, as well as the Maputo Declaration on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. As part of a comprehensive rural development programme the country has prioritised the empowerment of rural woman through the mainstreaming of gender equality programmes (Govender, 2012). In spite of that, South African rural women continue to face deep inequality in exercising their fundamental right of access to information.

This article adopts a case study research approach through the use of document analysis and interviews to investigate the role of two community radio stations in selected areas of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province of South Africa in the dissemination of information to women listeners. It also suggests ways in which these radios may be used to enhance access to information for rural women in South Africa. The findings reveal that although community radio stations are recognised as support systems for information dissemination in rural communities, their role in information dissemination to and community

development of women has not been fully explored. This article further suggests ways in which the services of community radios may be enhanced in the provision of information to women.

Problem statement

Community radios serve as information diffusion strategies where non-governmental organisations, women organisations, civic groups and governments use the radio station to communicate developmental information in areas such as health, education and agriculture, among others, to the community (Fraser and Estrada, 1998; Mhagama, 2016; Milan, 2009; Nirmala, 2015). These radios create awareness, provide information and education, improve community skills, and provide for cultural, political and economic development and empowerment (Nirmala, 2015). Rural women play a crucial role in development (Mulauzi and Sitali, 2010). The post-apartheid Government of South Africa has prioritised the empowerment of rural women as part of a comprehensive rural development programme. Development goes beyond economic growth and technological advancement, to encompass democracy and freedom of expression through community media (Sen, 2000; Sewlal, 2014). The primary objectives of community radios are to empower those who were previously disempowered in order to enable them to participate in determining their own destiny through community systems (Muswede, 2015). Community radios may play an important role in the lives of rural South African women as an instrument of power in changing their lives. This article investigates the extent to which community radio stations contribute towards the dissemination of information and development of rural women in South Africa, and suggests ways in which these radios may be used to enhance the access of information to empower rural women.

Research questions

In order to realise the objective of this article, it is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the information services and programmes provided by community radios on women issues?
2. To what extent do community radio stations contribute towards the development of women in South Africa?
3. What are the challenges encountered by these radios in disseminating information to rural women?
4. In what ways can community radios be used to enhance the access of information to rural women in South Africa?

Methodology

The article adopts a case study research approach by investigating two selected community radios, namely Maputaland and Inanda FM in KwaZulu-Natal. KZN was chosen because it is South Africa's most populous province with over 25 community radios. Maputaland and Inanda FM community radios were purposively chosen as the cases to be studied because they are significant community radio stations in the country and in the province of KZN, specifically in terms of their role in the dissemination of information to women. The study used interviews to establish the views and perceptions of key personnel involved in management of the community radios in the dissemination of information to women and analysed documents on the websites of these radios.

Literature review

This section presents a review of literature on the following aspects: rural women and access to information in South Africa, community radios and community development, community radios in South Africa, and challenges to the provision of community radios in South Africa.

Rural women and access to information in South Africa

Rural women account for a great proportion of the world's agricultural labour force. They produce the majority of food grown, especially in subsistence farming, and perform most of the unpaid work in rural areas (Govender, 2012). According to the Committee for Economic Development (CED) (2003) 70% of the world's agricultural labour force comprises women. A household survey revealed that of the 52% of women who make up the South African population, almost 47% live in rural areas (Bobo, 2011). They play a central role in family, community and social development. A typical rural woman in South Africa will travel long distances to collect water and food. She will also engage in farming, childbearing and the sustainability of the family (Gatua et al., 2010; Joseph, 2013). The Constitution of South Africa guarantees equal rights for men and women, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and strives to promote social and economic equality. However, due to the lack of access to information, rural women remain invisible and unheard and this has exacerbated their position of educational and economic marginality. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Strategy for Action Gender and Food Security on the role of information observed that the exclusion of women from access to information also increases food insecurity (FAO, 2000).

The importance of accessing and utilising information by women in rural areas has been alluded to in the literature

(Jiyane, 2012; Jiyane and Mostert, 2010; Jiyane and Ocholla, 2004). Rural women's information needs range from traditional personal to development oriented information. Therefore, they should be provided with information on all aspects of their social lives (Mulauzi and Sitali, 2010). As observed by the CED (2003), nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development than the adequate recognition of the political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women. Section J of BPA refers to women and the media, with its two objectives being to increase the participation and access of women to expression and **decision-making** through the media and new technologies of communication; and a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media (Rolls, 2008: 3).

In spite of the improvements in information technology, radios remain the traditional mode of communication. Mooko (2002) found that women still prefer the oral form of accessing, using and disseminating information in Botswana. Jiyane and Mostert (2010: 53) found that radios are owned and widely used by rural women in the Umhlatuze Municipality for access to information. Women have much potential when it comes to community media. However, this potential is limited by lack of accessibility, participation and sustainability (Musubika, 2008).

Community radios and community development

The term 'community radio' has somewhat different meanings in different countries. It is considered to be third-tier broadcasting besides public and private radio broadcasting, which is managed, run and controlled by a community for the benefit of the community and is supposed to serve the interests and aspirations of the community (Nirmala, 2015). In the United Kingdom, the community radio is built around concepts of access and participation. In Latin American countries, the community radio, otherwise known as 'the peoples' radio', became the voice of the poor and the voiceless, the landless peasants, the urban shack dwellers, the impoverished indigenous nations, and the trade unions (Sharma, 2012). In South Africa it is referred to as community or participatory broadcasting initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest, or geographical community, to express their concerns, needs and aspirations without outside interference, subject to the regulation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (Rama and Louw, 1993). Two philosophically distinct approaches to community radio can be identified, though the models are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One stresses service or community mindedness and a focus on what the station can do for the community. The other stresses involvement and participation by the listeners (Sharma, 2012).

According to Rolls (2008: 8), community radio is essentially a non-profit enterprise that is owned by the community

and whose ethos remains independence and responsibility to serve the community and not the advertiser, even in the days of highly commercialised broadcasting. Rolls observes that the community actively takes part in community radio by creating news, information, entertainment and culturally relevant material with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. Rolls' definition of community radio seems valid when one considers the characteristics that differentiate community radio from other radio services, such as public and private radio. Public radio is driven by the interests of the government that owns and operates it, and understandably serves the public according to what the government thinks is best for the community. The purpose of private radio, which is owned and operated by individuals or a company, is to make money (Rolls, 2008: 9). According to a report by the National Endowment Democracy (NED) (2007: 6), community radio is about the horizontal exchange of information – participatory interaction between the community and the radio station rather than vertical, one-way communication, delivering information from a medium to the public. The popularity of these radio stations is attributed to the fact that they can be listened to at home, in offices, and in private and public places anywhere and at any time (Ntab, 2004: 3).

Community radio stations support community endeavours. These radio stations inform, guide, and entertain the people and provide a medium through which the most relevant educational local and developmental information is disseminated and aired (Sharma, 2012). Radio is a convenient tool for information access. It is affordable, reaches rural areas and does not require special skills for operation. Therefore, community radio generally becomes a tool for disseminating information to poor, illiterate people who live deep in rural areas. It can reach out to many diverse communities with minimal requirements in terms of money, infrastructure and skills. Community empowerment is realised in this way because such radio stations involve community organisation, joint thinking and decision-making, all of which have great potential for empowering communities and building a democratic society (Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA), 2007:7).

The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of the oppressed people, a medium that informs rural people of their rights, rules and laws, and a medium through which the voices of the rural people reach government (AMARC, 1981; Sharma, 2012). According to a report by the National Endowment for Democracy for CIMA (2007: 6), community radio mobilises groups to action by informing and empowering citizens by giving a voice to marginalised groups of society, thus bringing community needs to the attention of local and even national government. The idea of the informed citizen, able and willing to take challenges and to act, is a prerequisite for most democracies (Kivikuru, 2006). Therefore these radio stations meet this need by providing a platform and a voice to mobilise

communities to participate in issues that involve their political, economic, health, educational and environmental lives.

Community radio stations are also considered to be a platform for dialogue. They provide an avenue for people to express themselves and take necessary actions and decisions. These radio stations play a significant role in increasing and promoting participation and opinion sharing, improving and diversifying knowledge and skills, and in catering for the health and cultural needs of the poor and deprived rural communities (Ambekar, 2004; Islam, 2002; Kumar, 2003; Pavarala, 2007). Community radio movements are necessary pre-conditions to the democratisation of communication and redistribution of power (Wabwire, 2013). They provide a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences, and also to become active creators of and contributors to media (Al-hassan et al., 2011). Therefore, it may be said that community radios are crucial for rural women in democratic South Africa as they provide a free market place of ideas and opinions where women are given the opportunity to express themselves socially, politically and culturally.

The issue of language is very important for information access and use. Community radios bridge the language barrier by using local languages for their programmes, thus achieving wider coverage and reaching diverse listeners. By using local languages these radio stations stimulate participation and support in communities and create a sense of belonging and ownership. Communities are generally empowered by information broadcasted in a language they understand.

Community radios in South Africa

The rationale for community radio in South Africa is due to an effort to dismantle the apartheid system, empower the disadvantaged majority, and build a democracy that facilitates access to information for diverse groups, among which are rural women cooperatives, Afrikaner communities and a variety of religious bodies (Buckley, 2000). The concept is also justified on constitutional, social, cultural and development grounds if one considers that South Africa is multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious with nine provinces and more than nine tribal communities. Since the dawn of multiracial democracy, the total number of community radio stations in the country has risen to more than 200, broadcasting diverse contents in the country's different languages, and excluding the many others whose licences are still under consideration (Gondwe and Mavindidze, 2014). These radio stations exist in all the nine provinces of South Africa and include religious stations, ethnic stations and stations that serve particular geographic areas. The country has the largest and most vibrant community radio sector on the

African continent (Nell and Shapiro, 2001). The radio model represents a mixed model fostered by the licensing authority of the Independent Communications Authority in accordance with the Independent Broadcasting Act of 1991). The South African Independent Broadcasting Act (153 of 1993) delineates three levels of broadcasting as public, commercial and community. The third level of broadcasting, community broadcasting, was established with the purpose of giving voiceless communities a medium through which to comment on their lives and experiences.

Community broadcasting in South Africa refers to broadcasting initiated and controlled by members of the community in order to express their concerns, needs or aspirations without interference subject to the regulation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (Duncan and Seleane, 1998). These radio stations account for one-third of the total radio listeners in the country and provide an unmediated form of communication that is close to the people and crucial to community development. There are four distinct categories of community radio in the country. The first category serves geographical areas such as the communities disadvantaged during the apartheid era. The second category is campus-based radio stations that are active on college and university campuses. The third category is religious stations such as evangelical Christian and Muslim radio stations. The fourth category of community radio stations targets cultural and ethnic communities such as Afrikaner communities and South Africans of Portuguese, Chinese and Greek origin (South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF), 2014). Community radio stations are perceived as critical vehicles for advancing community development, participation and access to information, particularly among communities that are excluded from mainstream media forms.

Challenges to the sustainability of community radio stations

There are several challenges that community radio stations encounter, which hinder their progress and sustainability. According to the Working Group Report for the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA, 2007: 14), challenges such as programming content, organisational development, equipment maintenance, and financial management are some of the challenges that could lead to the closure of the community radio station. The lack of adequate funding, insufficient numbers of trained personnel and the demonstration of poor leadership are some of the factors that have stunted a greater level of growth of community radio in South Africa (Sewlal, 2014). Community radio stations have to self-generate funding for their own sustainability. These radio stations rely on volunteers, donors, church organisations, international development agencies, and some advertising for funding. Megwa (2007) noted that

although hundreds of community radio applications have been processed in South Africa, few stations remain on air for long due to funding issues. This has resulted in several challenges such as monthly operational costs that have to be met, as well as incapability of maintaining equipment and working technologies. As a result it is difficult to sustain employee salaries, ensure their retention and also keep up with research for content and programmes. The consequence of this is that community listeners suffer and migrate to other, better sustained radio stations such as national and international radio stations, which most likely do not meet their needs

Findings and discussion

This section reports on the research findings of the two selected community radios, namely Maputaland and Inanda FM in KwaZulu-Natal. First, the background information on the two community radios is presented. This is then followed by an exploration of the extent to which these radio stations contribute towards the development of women in South Africa. Furthermore, the challenges encountered by these radios in disseminating information to rural women are presented. Lastly, the extent to which community radio stations contribute towards the development of women in south Africa is reported on.

Background information

Maputaland Community Radio Station is situated along the north-eastern region of KZN. Its licence was issued in 2002 in terms of Section 43 of the International Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993. The radio's broadcasting area is the Umkhanyakude District Municipality, which contains five local municipalities, i.e. Jozini, Umhlabuyalingana, Hlabisa, Hluhluwe and Mtubatuba. Among its activities are meeting the needs within the education sector's rural development, human rights and democracy (Ntsele, 2010). The station is broadcast from Jozini on 107.6 FM. It targets Zulu as well as English, Tsonga, Swazi and Afrikaans speaking listeners. Its vision is to be a vibrant community broadcaster responsive to the dynamic needs of the local people. Its mission is to empower the local communities and the surrounding areas with relevant information that will improve the quality of life of the Maputaland region. One of the major objectives of this radio station is to uplift the disadvantaged social sectors of the community. By virtue of the policy and vision of this radio station, the programmes offered are expected to be entertaining, educational and informative. The radio station develops its programmes from suggestion boxes placed in certain key areas, telephone contacts, promotional events, public forums and community mapping. The estimated 152,000 listeners in 2011 has since grown to over 580,000.

Inanda FM community radio is an eThekweni Municipality-based community radio station broadcast from Inanda 88.4 and situated in Inanda, KZN. It started broadcasting in 2003 under a special events licence and in 2009 the station went on air. The vision of this radio station is to develop and empower the community. Its mission is to inform, educate and entertain the community and to raise community awareness on various developmental and socioeconomic issues. The primary objective of this radio station is to empower the community through broadcasting, lobbying and advocating against abuse of children and women, and in contributing to community development. It broadcasts in Xhosa, Zulu and English and the target group is unspecified.

Services, information and programmes provided by community radios on women's issues

Both Maputaland and Inanda FM community radio stations have programmes that feature women's issues, although they are not designed specifically for women because they cover other topics of community interest. One such programme that deals with women's issues in Maputaland is 'Hlomangolwazi' (Be armed with knowledge). It sounds very obvious from the name of the programme that it is not tailored specifically to women. It features interviews and discussions on varied community projects and health issues involving women. It was established that many women listen to these programmes in order to seek solutions for their family's health and what is happening in the community. Among the topics covered during this programme are women in business projects, the role of women in churches and domestic violence. It also engages women in participatory debate.

At Inanda FM, the programme that features women issues is 'Sivubelalsizweshow' (Equipping the nation for tomorrow). This is a magazine show presented by women and focuses mainly on women's issues. However, the name of the programme, just like that of Maputaland, is not aimed at only women. It also discusses spiritual and physical health related matters, as well as other social issues. It is a community driven show that profiles women in and around the community and beyond who do good things for themselves. The radio station sometimes organises slots with experts to inform and educate women regarding their issues. Undoubtedly, the broadcasting of programmes not directly related to women may also equip women with information on whom to contact and where to go for more information and assistance regarding their issues.

Neither radio station has established information sessions and services for women. It is also significant to note that the programmes featuring women's issues on both stations are broadcast during the day between 9am and 12pm. The interviewees at both radio stations were comfortable

with these times slots. At Maputaland, an interviewee felt that the time was very relevant and ideal for the listeners because only a minority of the women were domestic workers while the majority did not work at all. At Inanda FM the impression was that the time is suitable because farmers listen to these programmes on their earphones, and there are many women who are at home as housewives, while some worked at crèches. The reality is that one wonders how many rural women can afford or even appreciate the use of earphones. Also it is common knowledge that rural women play a key role in supporting their households and communities in providing food, nutrition security, generating an income and improving the rural livelihoods and overall well-being of the family (Women Watch, 2012). This is no exception in South Africa where rural women constitute most of the agricultural labour force, produce the majority of food grown through subsistence farming, and perform most of the unpaid work. The response from the interviewees is probably because these slots are convenient to the radio and its presenters as they fall within normal working hours, thus overlooking the availability of the target listeners. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that these programmes are being broadcast at a time when most women are out and about fending for their families and may not benefit much from the issues discussed.

Challenges of community radio stations in disseminating information to women

Both community radio stations did not appear to encounter specific challenges in broadcasting women-related issues except for the general challenge of limited resources available in terms of finances, insufficient employees, limited skills and knowledge, limited time to collect information for programmes, and limited and outdated equipment for day-to-day station activities. Due to the lack of adequate financial resources, producing programmes and conducting proper research remains a challenge. This is also likely to be so because by regulation these radios are supposed to be non-profit-making organisations. Advertising remains the main source of income generation. The South African Government also supports these radios by virtue of its Community Radios Support Programme established in 1998. Issues of transparency and accountability are rife with regard to both community radios.

The extent to which community radio stations contribute towards the development of women in South Africa

It is clear from the visions and missions of both community radio stations that they may play a significant role in rural development through the provision of information, education and entertainment programmes around the clock to the listeners, although not necessarily on only women's

issues. These radio stations dedicate more than half of their time to content and less than half to music. Findings from Maputaland revealed a reduction in the number of domestic violence cases reported per day from the police stations. This may be an indication that awareness of domestic violence, detailing the contact centres and places where domestic violence could be reported and safety could be sought, is making an impact on the listener. Although both radio stations offer diverse programmes that cut across all ages and genders and represent the entire community, there is no specific provision in the vision of these radio stations on the community development of women. As already noted above, both community radios provided at least one community-driven programme featuring women's issues, although not specifically dedicated to women. Both radio stations acknowledge the need for improvement in the dissemination of programmes offered and the dissemination of information to women listeners.

In Maputaland, the interviewees acknowledged the need to see more sponsors supporting women's programmes, improving programme quality and providing more outreach services. Both radio stations acknowledged the need to empower women as presenters and also encourage them to venture into career paths in radio, particularly in the technical production of the programmes. The fact that Inanda FM is headed by a South African woman makes it easy to reach out and inspire other women. Gatua et al. (2010) observed that fostering women's development and leadership in radio station management has had significant success in rural Senegal. They suggest that there are new roles for these women that have led to greater community engagement, a higher radio listenership, and the resulting discussion groups and income-generating activities. Moreover, the radio programmes have actively promoted community activities that have empowered both women and men in these rural communities. As a result, more people feel confident about expressing themselves regarding the development challenges faced by their entire communities.

Guidelines for enhancing information dissemination and community development of women in South Africa through community radios

It is clear from the above findings that although community radios in South Africa recognise their role in the education, development and entertainment of the rural community, the role in the dissemination of services to rural women is still underexplored. This section draws from the findings of the preceding section to suggest ways in which community radios may enhance the delivery of services to rural women in South Africa. Among these measures are the provision of awareness campaigns to woman, the participatory involvement of women and community effort in overcoming financial challenges.

Community radio and the provision of information and awareness campaigns to rural women

The historical philosophy of community radio is that it is the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of the oppressed people, and generally is a tool for development (AMARC, 1981). Given the plight of rural women and the fact that ignorance has hindered their access to the media, taking the radio to the rural women through awareness campaigns is crucial. Community radios in South Africa should be seen to be proactive towards women as voiceless citizens through awareness campaigns. Rural women should be made aware of the fact that the media is an entity that exists to serve the community rather than an entity that is aloof. Thus, radio stations should not be seen as an island, but rather as a bottom-up communication entity that should encouraged key players to be involved in the decision-making process (Sewlal, 2014). Women should be encouraged to visit these radio stations and make use of the services provided. This may be achieved through door-to-door community visits where women are sensitised through dialogue to the importance and the role of community radio in their areas. Awareness campaigns may also take the form of information awareness to women on issues that they need to exercise their rights on such matters as children's rights, personal laws, and laws of inheritance, dowry, polygamy, early marriage, divorce and custody of children. The campaigns may also take the form of communicating important legal, human and socioeconomic topical issues to the women such as social change, gender sensitivity, women's rights, personal and family hygiene, farming, poultry, and other agricultural related issues relevant to subsistence farmers and health issues. Health information, for example, enables women to treat and prevent diseases, know the causes of illness, promote good health, make decisions, make choices, overcome constraints and misconceptions, cope with illnesses, support the community/self-help, change behaviour, change attitudes and participate in information awareness raising, and for general health knowledge (Musoke, 2005). Given that illiteracy remains a major challenge for rural women, these radio stations may feature educational programmes that provide women with a basic education on reading, writing and counting.

Although it was reported that women generally listen to the radio in the early hours of the morning, the fact that rural women spend their time out on the farms or at work means that they may miss out on early and mid-morning programmes. Therefore, the time slot for women should shift from the mornings when they are out fending for their families, to the afternoons and the evenings when most have returned home.

Programmes should be presented and communicated in an entertaining manner. Programme presentations may take the form of radio dramas, folk songs and talk shows

on hard hitting topics, on-the-spot interviews on topical issues, poems, debates, and discussions involving successful women. For example, 'Rise' is a recently conceived SABC1 television talk show in South Africa that deals with hard-hitting topics on women (Siyabonga, 2015). It has attracted over two million viewers since it went on air, making it the second biggest talk show after 'Zaziwa' on SABC1. However, given that 'Rise' is a national television talk show and many rural women cannot afford a television, and those who can afford television may not fully understand what is featured due to language barriers, the talk show ideas of 'Rise' are worth emulating by community radio stations for rural women.

It is also important to encourage and train more female presenters who are knowledgeable in the local language and who have expertise in particular subject areas. Fostering women's involvement and leadership in radio station management and in the development of programmes will help in building their self-confidence. Akhter (2010) observed that women involvement in programmes has created a positive impact on other deprived women in community radio in Bangladesh, where women as leaders in community radio issues have developed self-confidence, and self-empowerment of other women has resulted. The duration of programmes should not be more than 20 minutes because when programmes in order to keep a listener focused.

Community radio as a participatory mechanism for women

Sharma (2012) identified two philosophically distinct approaches to community radios: one focusing on what the station can do for the community, and the other stressing the involvement and participation of the listener. In the same vein, Fraser and Estrada (1998), Milan (2009), Nirmala (2015) and Mahagama (2016) observed that community radios are meant to provide two concurrent functions. The first is to serve as an information diffusion strategy where non-governmental organisations, women's organisations, civic groups and governments use the radio station to communicate developmental information in areas such as health, education and agriculture, among others, to the community. The other function is that community radios are part of communication for development where the voices of the voiceless are heard, and are expected to be active participants in the development process through programme production, financing, and management and the daily operations of the station. It stands to reason, therefore, that a major distinction between the community radio sector and private or public radio is the element of participation by listeners at all levels of the station. This involves the inclusion of community members in the board, management and programming structures of the station (Muswede, 2015). Participation is a key feature

of governance development work. Moyo (2014) and Oakley (1991) view participation as a tool that increases people's sense of control over issues that affect their livelihoods, helps them to learn how to plan and implement, and on a broader front, prepares them for participation at a regional or even national level.

Although community radios in South Africa are referred to as participatory broadcasting, thus leaning towards the philosophy of involvement and participation by the listener, in reality listeners appear to be passive in the process and are more on the receiving end of looking at what the radio can do for them. Therefore, by virtue of the South African definition of community radios, these radio stations should be viewed as participatory broadcasting, initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest to express their concerns, needs and aspirations without outside interference, subject to the regulations of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. It is important that community radios are not only perceived as entities that exist to provide information and services to the rural women communities, but also as entities that women can use for communication and enhancing their development. It is only when the women in the rural community are aware of the fact that community radios exist for them that they will recognise and appreciate their participative role in this process.

One way that community radios may serve as a participatory mechanism is through listeners' clubs. Listeners' clubs focus on the use of community radio as a participatory medium for information and communication that focuses on action. A community listeners' club is a group of men and women who listen to radio programmes actively and systematically with a view to discussing the content and putting into practice the lessons learned (FAO-Dimitra, 2011). It takes the form of identification of a subject, production of a programme, dialogue and discussions, decision-making, finding a means of action, and feeding back the experience. A listeners' club is considered to be an information source, a decision-making tool, and a means of empowerment and a tool in negotiation. These clubs are centred on the community and not linked to a programme station; they are not 'fan clubs' and are not used as a platform for political agendas. Inanda community radio stopped its listeners' forum because certain individuals and groups took advantage of the platform and used it inappropriately for political campaigning. Listeners' clubs should serve as a platform where women are given the opportunity to express themselves and unpack issues and topics they wish to discuss. These clubs should create opportunities for women to speak to other women or may focus on imparting information relating to the lives of women such as HIV/AIDS, family law, disabilities of women, agriculture, gender inequality, education, social problems, and other vital community issues such as poverty, violence against women, micro finance, reproductive health and early childhood development (Akhter, 2011; Al-hassan et al., 2011). South

Africa's SABC1 has a 'Rise Young Women's Listeners Club' across the country designed to get young women in the cities to build a movement for support and change for themselves (Siyabonga, 2015). FAO-Dimitra (2011) observed that listeners' clubs in the Democratic Republic of Congo are a highly participatory community listener process for women that focus on themes such as food security, nutrition, women's access to education, information, democracy, and sexual and marital violence, among other issues patronising to women. Mathur and Neurath (1959) established a farmer-driven radio listenership group where farmers identified their needs and programmes were made for them. These programmes were then listened to, discussed and recommendations were made for community action.

Besides listeners' clubs, another participatory mechanism is to get women in the community to actively participate in determining the content of programmes, radio activities and in the actual broadcasting. Contributing ideas towards programme development enhances community ownership and participation. Sterling et al. (2009) observed that when female community radio listeners are given a voice to produce information that contributes to their advancement, and they are able to respond to programmes and create programming content, they will be more likely to benefit from opportunities for development rather than simply consuming information provided by others.

Programmes tailored for women

Although the visions and mission statements of both community radios suggest that they can play a significant role at a grass roots level towards the development, provision of information, education and entertainment of the rural community, it is not explicit with regard to the specific role they may play in developing rural women. The lack of a specific vision for women may explain why these radio stations do not have specifically women-focused programmes. Community radios have proved to be a sustainable and interactive medium for poor and marginalised populations to be heard and informed, shape knowledgeable opinions, learn the give-and-take art of informed dialogue, and become more decisive agents in their own development.

It is therefore imperative that the mission, vision and objectives of these community radios are specifically reviewed to enhance information dissemination to rural women as the voice of the voiceless in the community. A Feminist International Radio Endeavour (FIRE) that began in Costa Rica in 1998 is an example of a successful women's grass roots community radio worth emulating, which provides a model for the empowerment of women (FIRE, 1998). It is entirely owned and operated by women and it is geared towards empowering the marginalised rural women by giving them access to communication and information channels. It focuses on women's perspectives

and issues. It also provides a space where women from around the world can communicate freely in order to strengthen international awareness of the plight of women, and most importantly, remove barriers of nationality, culture, race, class and language. An example may be drawn from the Moutse Community Radio Station (MCRS) in Limpopo, South Africa. This station was founded by the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) to address issues affecting women in the area. Not only have the on-air programmes inspired communities, but the activities of stations in the respective community itself (like on Madiba Day) have also made a tangible difference (Sewlal, 2014).

Proactive ways of raising funds

Notwithstanding the fact that there is a need to see more sponsors supporting women's programmes towards improving programme quality and providing outreach programmes in the form of donations, sponsorships and other commercial activities, women's involvement in the designing and participation of radio activities will result in a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility that will enable them to contribute either by cash or kind towards the sustainability of an entity that exists for the community. It is therefore important that communities move away from the 'dependency syndrome' and realise that community radios exist for them, and also that it is their responsibility to play an innovative role in contributing toward the sustainability of these radios through community donations in cash and kind. For example, a community radio in Nepal, known as Radio Madanpokhara, raised its funds through one man's idea that each household should contribute rice or cash to the radio station (Kasajoo, 2004). Also, radio stations should continue to inculcate a spirit of volunteerism in the community. These stations should encourage the community membership of women and their participation in the operations selection and creation of programmes. An example may be drawn from Mali where, even though these stations received external support, local people have been involved at all stages in these community radios – from the project initial design to the construction of the station buildings (Abubakar, 2006). Nonetheless, government, through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), would do well to ensure its sustainability by ensuring that the management of funds is clear, transparent and accountable. For example, the Community Radio Support Programme obtained in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada was clear, transparent and accountable (Community Radio Support Programme Report and Recommendation, 2011).

Conclusion

This article investigates the extent to which community radio stations contribute towards the dissemination of

information and development of rural women in South Africa. The findings reveal that the role of community radio in disseminating information and in empowering women towards a community's development has not been fully explored. It is clear from the findings that there are not many information awareness programmes tailored towards women and that women are more at the receiving end in these radio stations rather than active participants in the ownership and management of the programmes. It was also observed that lack of adequate funding and insufficient numbers of trained personnel are some of the factors that have stunted a greater level of growth of community radios. In order for these radios to contribute significantly towards community development, the present mission and vision statements should go beyond the provision of information, education and entertainment programmes to include a clause that ensures women as active participants. Women should be at the centre of the production, development and decision-making of these programmes. Rural women participation in the ownership and management of community radios will result in a sense of control over issues that affect their livelihoods. It will help them to learn how to plan and implement on a broader front, and will prepare them for participation at a regional and national level in defending their interests. The article further suggests that empowering rural women's access and participation in community radios may take the form of awareness campaigns and door-to-door community visits where women are sensitised through dialogue on the importance and the role of community radio in their areas. Community radios should not be recognised as islands that are aloof from the women, but rather as a medium for effective inclusive and participative involvement for rural development.

Community radio stations are the number one mass medium in South Africa and provide easy access to citizen participation by being widely available. There is therefore a dire need for improvement in the dissemination of information to women and the active participation of women in these radio stations. Moyo (2014) observed that participation is key to development. Rural women may play a role in defining the development problems, finding solutions to problems faced by their communities, and in determining their destiny by participating in community radios.

It is clear that the life and the future of the rural economy will be information and knowledge-driven (Joseph, 2013). A follow-up study of a survey of community radios and the provision of information to women in all the nine provinces in the country will provide a better understanding of the roles of community radio stations supporting women's listenership in communities. This article focused on the perspective of the radio stations, but there is still a need to consult with women listeners to find out from them whether programmes broadcast by community radio stations equip them with necessary information.

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