

# 11. Pretending the People come First: Human Rights, Media and Digital Communications in Post-Apartheid South Africa

By Rebecca Zausmer<sup>1</sup>

The state of democracy and human rights in South Africa is in decline. Politicians are seemingly more accountable internally to one another than externally to their voters<sup>2</sup>. Many South Africans at the grassroots level - who were denied a voice during Apartheid - are still being marginalised from the public conversation and genuine political participation<sup>3</sup>. The rights so explicitly enshrined in South Africa's progressive constitution – including the right to access information and freedom of expression – have not yet been translated into reality for the majority of the population. And while South Africa is an economic giant on the African continent, it is also the second most unequal country in the world<sup>4</sup> with huge economic, social, and racial disparities. 24 per cent of the population still remain illiterate<sup>5</sup>, and a quarter of South Africans are unemployed<sup>6</sup>. Socio-economic rights are clearly not being realised either.

In any democracy, media and communications are crucial spaces for public debate, where politicians are held to account. They are a means for citizens to exercise their rights by accessing and imparting information and expressing themselves freely. And digital communications opens up the space even more. In short media and communications are both a facilitator and an indicator of human rights. And in South Africa, where democracy and human rights are struggling, the need for them to be in free and healthy spaces is even greater.

This chapter explores how far media and communications are succeeding in promoting the civil and socio-economic rights of South African citizens. The potential is huge: nearly all South Africans have access to some form of offline media. Mobile penetration has boomed with infrastructure reaching remote areas of the country. Activist groups and social movements are increasingly using digital communications to organise, mobilise and inform. The mobile internet could ensure universal access to the internet. Innovation in the ICT sector is impressive with technologies being created by and for South Africans. And these are being adapted and used at a local level. Also the mobile phone offers a cheap and personal means to deliver services to people across the country: the government, NGOs and civil society are using ICTs as a means of hurdling traditional barriers to development.

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<sup>2</sup> Monash Africa Centre, 2011. *Summary of Lecture by Professor Steven Friedman: Democracy in South Africa: Where are we headed?*, [online] [http://www.monash.ac.za/news/2011/public-lecture-future-of-south-africa-democracy\\_2.html](http://www.monash.ac.za/news/2011/public-lecture-future-of-south-africa-democracy_2.html) [Accessed: 29/08/2011]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> This ranking is based on the GINI coefficient. In 2005, South Africa had a GINI coefficient of 65 and was second only to Namibia. Source: CIA World Factbook, 2010. Distribution of family income: GINI Index [online] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html> [Accessed 26/08/2011]

<sup>5</sup> CIA World Factbook, 2010. *South Africa* [online] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html> [Accessed: 24/08/2011]

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

But where there is potential there are also challenges. The media faces an atmosphere of increasing hostility towards itself, being generated from the top; the state is increasingly in control of the public broadcaster; and there has been a recent drive towards draconian legislation that seeks to limit freedom of expression and access to information. Inequality also plagues the media and communications sector and the government seems to be focusing more on its economy than its people. Access to the internet remains a privilege of the wealthy minority. Infrastructure to remote areas is weak. Prices are high. And where people do have access, they often lack the skills and educational levels to properly participate. But beyond problems of access and skills, there is a deeper issue of empty citizenship. South Africans are not actively engaged with issues and have a weak relationship with their government. Digital communications may be a means of addressing this, but they have not yet to become an interactive means for dialogue between government and citizen and cannot single-handedly create a culture of citizenship.

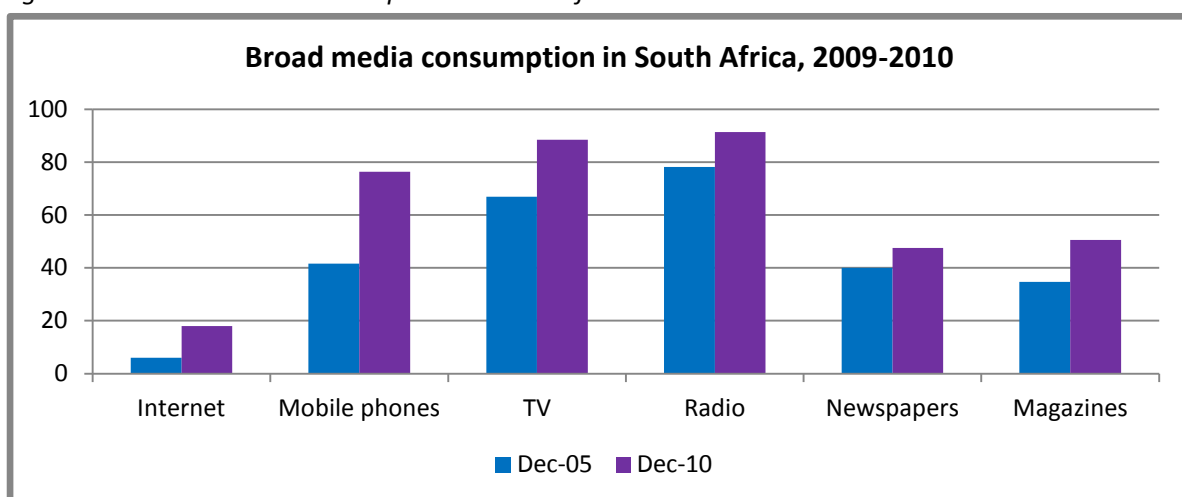
At the moment, it seems the potential of media and communications is being undermined by these challenges. The focus needs to be on reversing this.

### 11.1. Access

Access to information is a right enshrined in Section 32 of South Africa’s constitution. How far, though, has this been translated into genuine access to information for the country’s people? The answer is ‘not enough’. Social and economic divides affect access to all media and communications in the country. Today, most South Africans remain reliant on traditional, offline media for their information (Figure 33). At a time when “access to information technology is no longer a luxury, but a basic human need”<sup>7</sup> - the majority of South Africans are still excluded from the online world and it looks like a very long road to inclusion, indeed.

#### 11.1.1. Offline media: still the main means of accessing information

Figure 33<sup>8</sup>: Broad media consumption in South Africa 2009-2010



<sup>7</sup> Burnheim, S., *The right to communicate: The Internet in Africa*, ARTICLE 19 [online]

<http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/africa-internet.pdf> [Accessed: 29/08/2011]

<sup>8</sup> SAARF, 2011. *SAARF AMPS Presentation: January – December 2010*, Nielsen, South Africa [online]

<http://www.saarf.co.za/> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

The chart above gives a broad overview of media consumption in South Africa (Figure 33). In the last five years, access to all media has clearly increased. The most striking increase is in access to mobile phones which has nearly doubled. Television and radio remain the most accessible media in South Africa. In contrast, print media is accessed by only about half of the population. What stands out most, though, is the extent to which internet access is lagging in comparison to all other media: the internet is clearly a minority privilege. More detailed analysis of these access trends and what they mean for the rights of South Africans is discussed now.

#### Broadcast media - highest access rates

The chart highlights how important traditional, offline media remains as a source of information for South Africans. Radio has the broadest reach in South Africa (Figure 33). In 2010, public broadcast stations were accessible to 91 per cent of the population. The extent of reach is not surprising. Radio is a low cost medium: stations are free to access and radio sets are relatively cheap with over 76 per cent of households owning one<sup>9</sup>. In 2009, South Africa had 18 public broadcast, 13 commercial, 3 low-powered<sup>10</sup> and over 100 community radio stations<sup>11</sup>.

The problem is that not all of these stations are accessible to South Africans, particularly in poor, rural areas. This is in a large part due to language and geography. All commercial stations are based in the major cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Polokwane, Nelspruit and Mafikeng. They also broadcast mainly in the English language. There are dedicated public broadcast stations for all eleven official languages<sup>12</sup> and some Khoi San languages. The limited number of stations available in each language, though, reduces the diversity of content and opinion available to these language groups. Community radio is seen as a means of countering this. Initially, community radio stations existed mainly in towns and cities, but the network is now much broader after the regulator began to target licenses geographically and on poor and disadvantaged areas in the country. Stations broadcast in all official and other languages and dialects. But community radio in South Africa has problems around sustainability, with the majority of stations unable to generate any substantial revenues through advertising. There is also a lack of skills and knowledge around operations and programming. These factors mean that community radio is a floundering sector in South Africa and has limited capacity to give communities meaningful access to information<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Stats SA, Community Survey 2007, in L. Lloyd and J. Duncan, 2010. South Africa: A Survey by The Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project, Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) and Open Society Media Program (OSMP), *Public Broadcasting in Africa Series*, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, Johannesburg, p. 23

<sup>10</sup> ICASA, 2009. *Annual Report 2008/9, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa*, [online] p. 6, <http://www.icasa.org.za/Portals/0/ICASA%20Annual%20Report%202009.pdf> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>11</sup> National Community Radio Forum, *About Us*, National Community Radio Forum [online], <http://www.ncrf.org.za/> [Accessed 30/08/2011]

<sup>12</sup> These are: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Sesotho sa Leboa, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, and siSwati

<sup>13</sup> Association for Progressive Change, 2009. *ICTs for Democracy Information and Communication Technologies for the Enhancement of Democracy – with a Focus on Empowerment*, SIDA [online] [http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/SIDA\\_ICTs+for+Democracy.pdf](http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/SIDA_ICTs+for+Democracy.pdf) [Accessed 26/08/2011]

Television is also accessible by a majority of South Africans. In 2010, 84 per cent of households owned a television set<sup>14</sup> and 89 per cent had access to television. 7 out of 12 television channels are free to access<sup>15</sup>.

Table 12: Licensed television stations in South Africa<sup>16</sup>

Public	Private free	Subscription	Subscription satellite	Community
<b>SABC 1</b>	E.TV	M-NET	DSTV	Soweto TV (Johannesburg)
<b>SABC 2</b>			Super 5 (was Telkom Media)	Cape Community TV (Cape Town)
<b>SABC 3</b>			On Digital Media	Bay TV (Richards Bay)
			Walking on Water (religion)	

The 2013 plan for migration from analogue to digital is an issue that threatens television access levels. Part of the strategy does include increasing the number of public channels available to create more diverse content. The costs to government may be extremely high, but there are also considerable costs for households themselves. Half of the households who do have access to television - an estimated 4.5 million - do not have the money to buy new or additional equipment required for the switch over<sup>17</sup>. Criteria and application details for a promised subsidy scheme have to date still not been published. And the migration will do nothing to give access to the remaining 11 per cent who do not have access: remoteness, low electrification and low incomes will remain barriers whether television in South Africa is analogue or digital.

#### Print media - some barriers to access

Compared to broadcast media, access to print media in South Africa is relatively low (Figure 33). In 2010, newspaper readership stood at nearly 48 per cent; just over half of the reach of broadcast media. Literacy is of course a barrier to universal readership of print media. But if all 'literate' South Africans were reading, readership would be just over 86 per cent<sup>18</sup>. The problem, therefore, appears to be one of cost. Aside from free material, the cost of newspapers and magazines exceeds the cost of basic foodstuffs. This means that there is high readership per copy with up to 14 different people reading one copy of a print publication (included in the 48 per cent statistic above)<sup>19</sup>.

There are over 54 daily and weekly newspapers in South Africa<sup>20</sup>, but English dominates the country's most popular papers (Table 13). The main dailies are also clearly targeted at the South

<sup>14</sup> SAARF, 2011. *SAARF AMPS Presentation 2010*

<sup>15</sup> Jones, C., 20 October 2009. *Pay-TV competition stalls*, ITWeb [online] [http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=27311:paytvcompetition-stalls&catid=69:business&Itemid=58](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27311:paytvcompetition-stalls&catid=69:business&Itemid=58) [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd and Duncan, 2010, p. 24

<sup>17</sup> Armstrong, C., and R. Collins, 2010. Digital Turmoil for South African TV, in *International Journal of Digital Television*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 14

<sup>18</sup> This is the rate of literacy in South Africa based on CIA World Factbook, 2010. *South Africa* [online] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html> [Accessed 24/08/2011]

<sup>19</sup> SAARF AMPS 2009 in Lloyd and Duncan, 2010, p. 20

<sup>20</sup> Calculated from SAARF, 2010, *AMPS Trended Media Data: Magazine and Newspaper Readership Dec10*, SAARF [online] <http://www.saarf.co.za/AMPS/PDF/Readership%20summary%20Dec%2010%20-%20with%20non%20pay%20publications-n.pdf> [Accessed 28/08/2011]

Africa's more affluent provinces (Table 13)<sup>21</sup>. All of these factors limit access and accessibility of print media for poor and remote South Africans.

Table 13: Top daily and weekly newspapers in South Africa by percentage readership<sup>22</sup>

	Penetration 2005 (% adult population)	Penetration 2010 (% adult population)	Region	Language
<b>Daily newspapers</b>				
<i>All</i>	22.7	24.9		
Daily Sun	9.8	14.8	Gauteng Free State Eastern Cape KwaZulu-Natal	English
Sowetan	5	4.5	Gauteng KwaZulu-Natal	English
Son	4	3.1	Western Cape Eastern Cape Northern Cape Central SA	Afrikaans
Isolezwe	1.6	2	KwaZulu Natal	isuZulu
<b>Weekly newspapers</b>				
<i>All</i>	30.5	33.4		
Sunday Times	10.7	11.2	National	English
Soccer-Laduma	5.7	8.6	National	English
Sunday Sun	6.2	7	National	English
City Press	6.4	5.5	National	English

### 11.1.2. Digital communications – access is a barrier to realising human rights

#### The landscape - internet lag but mobile boom

South Africa's performance on access to the internet is unimpressive. In terms of total number of users it appears to do relatively well compared to the rest of Africa (Figure 34). But internet penetration in the country stands at a paltry 12.3 per cent<sup>23</sup>. South Africa – the country with the highest GDP on the continent – falls to fourteenth place behind several North African countries and Uganda<sup>24</sup>. And this is not a close fourteenth either. Morocco's internet penetration, for example, is

<sup>21</sup> Percentage provincial incomes in: Bureau of Market Research, 2007. *National and provincial personal income of South Africans*, University of South Africa [online]

<http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/faculties/ems/docs/Press361.pdf> [Accessed 13/09/2011]

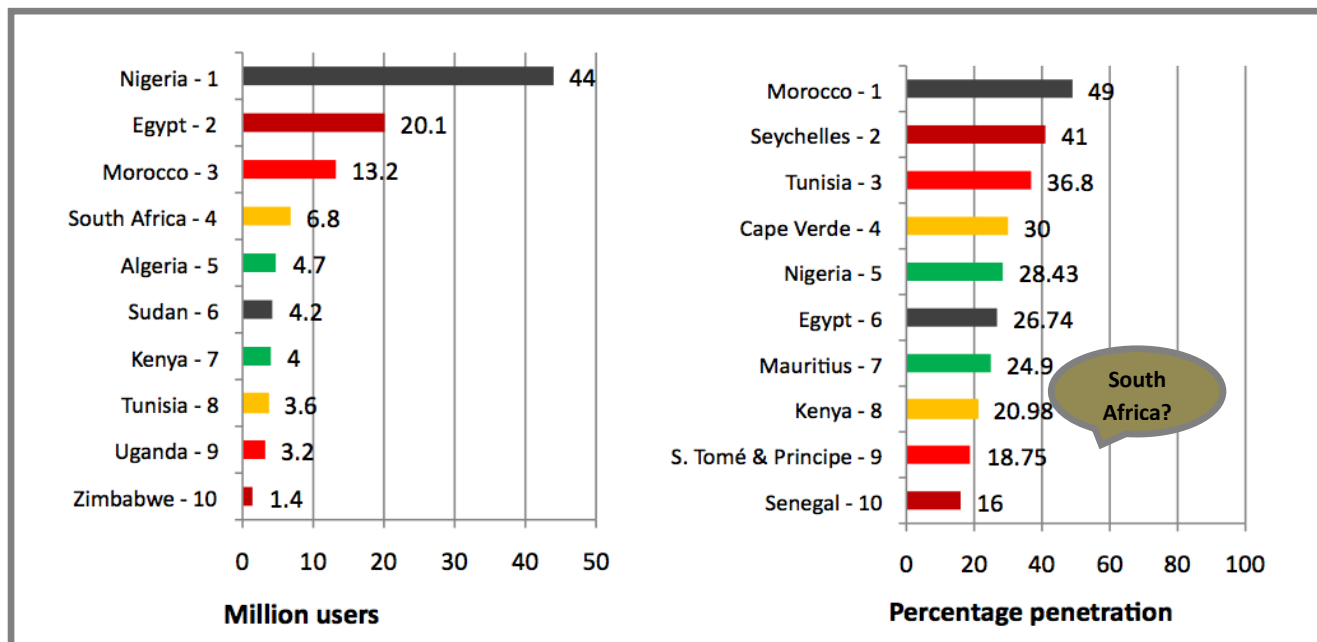
<sup>22</sup> From a variety of sources: SAARF, 2011. *SAARF AMPS Presentation 2010*; and SAARF, 2005. *SAARF AMPS 2005, African Response, South Africa*, [online] <http://www.saarf.co.za/> [Accessed 25/08/2011]; and MediaClubSouthAfrica, *The press in South Africa*, MediaClubSouthAfrica.com [online] [http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=73%3Apress&catid=36%3Amedia\\_bg&Itemid=54#weekly](http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73%3Apress&catid=36%3Amedia_bg&Itemid=54#weekly) [Accessed 26/08/2011]

<sup>23</sup> ITU ICT EYE, 2010. *Estimated Internet users, fixed Internet subscriptions, fixed broadband subscriptions* [online] <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>24</sup> Calculated based on data for 57 African countries in *Ibid*

49 per cent<sup>25</sup>; approximately four times greater than South Africa's. And internally progress has been limited too, with penetration rates only increasing seven percentage points between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 35).

Figure 34<sup>26</sup>: Africa's top 10 internet countries



Percentage penetration, though, is based on subscription statistics and does not necessarily suggest real access numbers. South Africans without subscriptions can access the internet in the work place, internet cafés and an increasing number of information centres – Thusong Centres – set up by the government across the country. Still, though, estimates of actual access are only slightly higher at 18 per cent (Figure 33). More startling than internet penetration, though, is the broadband situation in the country. In 2010, just 1.5 per cent of the population had fixed line broadband subscriptions (Figure 35).

A striking and positive contrast is the mobile phone boom in South Africa. Network coverage extends to 90 per cent of the country<sup>27</sup>. Since 2004, access has almost doubled with nearly 77 per cent of South Africans having access to a mobile phone, whether it belongs to them or not (Figure 35). And with the advent of the smart phone, mobile platforms are increasingly being heralded as the answer to South Africa's internet access problem. More people now access the internet via mobile phones than they do by computers: an estimated 19 per cent<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> ITU ICT EYE, 2010. *Estimated Internet users, fixed Internet subscriptions, fixed broadband subscriptions*

<sup>26</sup> Millions of users taken from: Internet World Stats, 2011. *Africa top ten Internet countries*, [online] [www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm) [Accessed 25/08/2011];

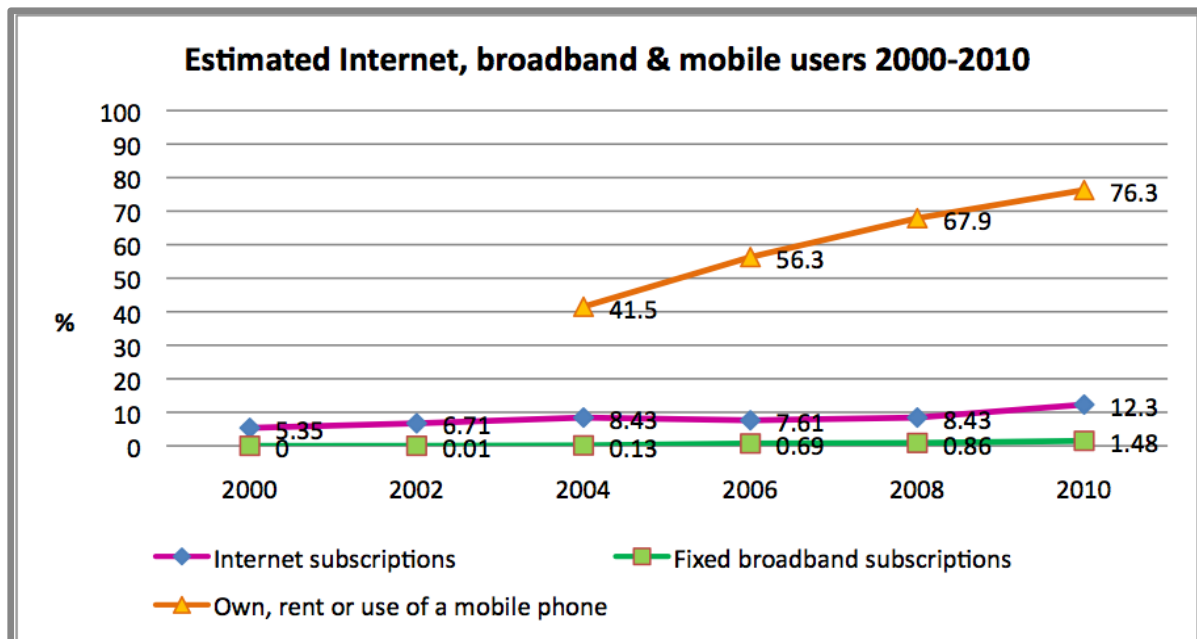
Percentage penetration taken from: ITU ICT EYE, 2000-2010. *Estimated Internet users, fixed Internet subscriptions, fixed broadband subscriptions*, [online] <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>27</sup> Freedom House, South Africa, in Freedom House, 2009. *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media*, Freedom House, Washington and NY, p. 7, [online]

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=383&report=79> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

Figure 35<sup>29</sup>: Estimated Internet, broadband and mobile users 2000-2010



### The lines of disparity

It is not hard to guess where the disparity lies in access to digital communications. The socio-economic inequalities that define South Africa, define its digital communications sector too. Internet infrastructure is concentrated in urban areas, putting South Africa's rural population at an immediate disadvantage. Figure 36 clearly shows that disparities also run along educational, racial and gender lines: access to internet is highest for South Africans with tertiary education, for males and for the white population.

Only four per cent of those with less than Matric level education (completion of secondary school) have access to the internet. The full meaning of this is emphasised when we consider that in 2006, 65 per cent of the entire population were educated to less than Matric level<sup>30</sup>. And then there is the substantial gender divide with more than double the men accessing the internet than women. Provincial statistics also give an indication of how income affects internet access. 77 per cent of South Africa's highest income earning group live in Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwazulu Natal<sup>31</sup>. These are the three provinces with the highest proportion of internet users (Figure 36).

In South Africa today, racial disparity is synonymous with income disparity. For example, 79 per cent of South Africa's highest income households are white<sup>32</sup>. As far as race/wealth is concerned, Figure

<sup>29</sup> Internet and broadband subscriptions taken from: ITU ICT EYE, 2000-2010. *Estimated Internet users, fixed Internet subscriptions, fixed broadband subscriptions*

Mobile phone figures taken from: SAARF, *AMPS Trended Media Data: Cellphone Trends*, SAARF [online] <http://www.saarf.co.za/> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

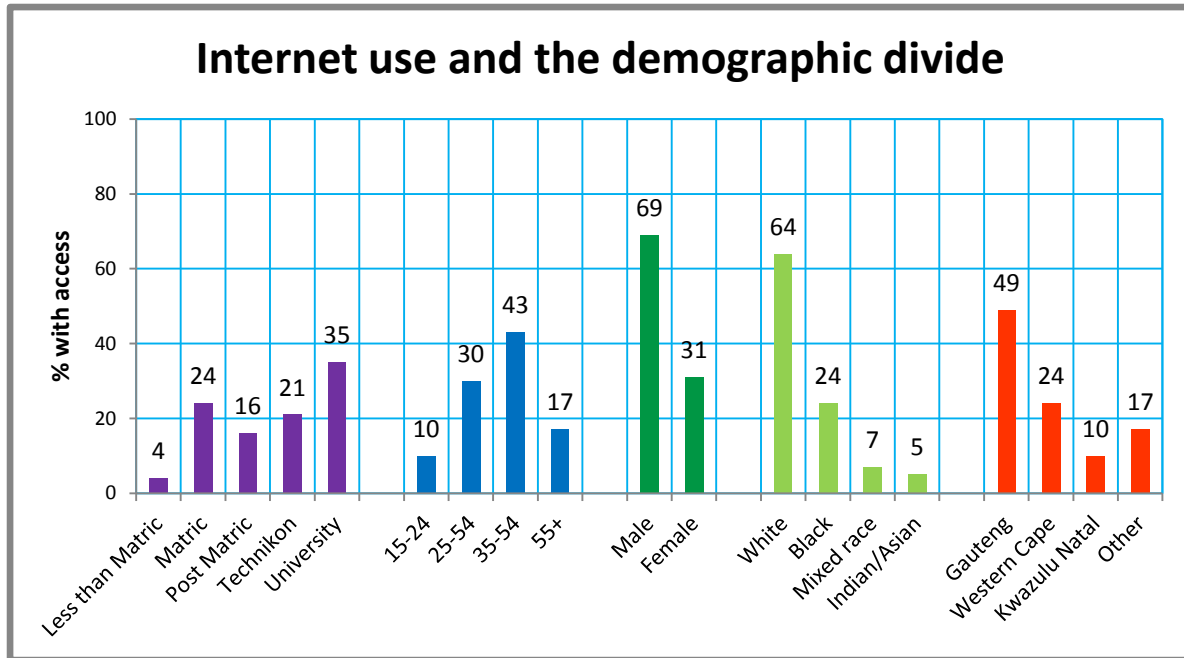
<sup>30</sup> 'AMPS2006RA' in Market Tree Consultancy, *Education Statistics South Africa*, Market Tree Consultancy [online] [http://www.markettree.co.za/fact\\_desc.html?fact\\_det:acode=15](http://www.markettree.co.za/fact_desc.html?fact_det:acode=15) [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>31</sup> Bureau of Market Research, 2009. *Household income and expenditure patterns and trends, 2008-2009*, University of South Africa [online] <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/faculties/ems/docs/Press395.pdf> [Accessed 20/09/2011]

<sup>32</sup> Bureau of Market Research, 2009

36 only gives half of the picture when you consider that the white minority has majority access to the internet. Figure 37 puts the racial and wealth inequality of internet access into better perspective.

Figure 36<sup>33</sup>: Internet use and demographic divide



The mobile boom may be encouraging in terms of the numbers with access but for the poor, penetration levels are still comparatively low. The majority of phone owners are in the upper income bracket. Only half of people in the lower three income quartiles own a phone<sup>34</sup>. There is also an urban-rural divide with only 49 per cent of the rural population having access to mobile phones<sup>35</sup>, although this divide is not nearly as extreme as with internet.

#### Explaining the barriers and challenges to accessing digital communications

So what is holding back access to digital communications in South Africa? Significantly, limited access is not the result of an oppressive government. The issue, therefore, is 'weak access to technology' and infrastructure<sup>36</sup>. And the major driver of this is cost and affordability for the majority. South Africa has had inflated telecommunications prices for a long time. Internet data services are high in comparison to income<sup>37</sup> and are some of the highest on the continent<sup>38</sup>. The OECD Telecoms Price

<sup>33</sup> Afrographique, 2011. *South Africa Internet Users*, Afrographique, [online] [http://s3.amazonaws.com/data.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_lofzt6i33o1qiuwg7o1\\_r1\\_1280.png?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ6IHWSU3BX3X7X3Q&Expires=1314446946&Signature=JqgMp43aVCTRs4WLRbgDGZJEGek%3D](http://s3.amazonaws.com/data.tumblr.com/tumblr_lofzt6i33o1qiuwg7o1_r1_1280.png?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ6IHWSU3BX3X7X3Q&Expires=1314446946&Signature=JqgMp43aVCTRs4WLRbgDGZJEGek%3D) [Accessed: 25/08/2011]

<sup>34</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010. *South African Sector Performance Review 2009/2010: Towards Evidence-based ICT Policy and Regulation*, *Research ICT Africa Series*, Vol. 2, Policy Paper 6, p. 32

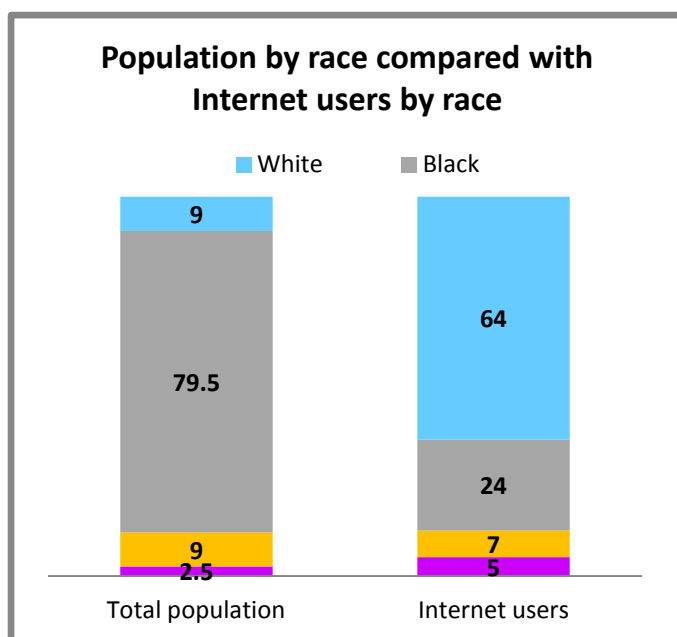
<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32

<sup>36</sup> Karlekar, K.D., and S.G. Cook, 2009. *Access and Control: A growing diversity of threats to internet*, in 2009. *Freedom on the Net: A Global Assessment of Internet and Digital Media*, Freedom House, Washington and NY 2009. p. 4 [online] <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=383&report=79> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.6

<sup>38</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, p. 30

Figure 37<sup>39</sup>: Population by race compared with internet users by race



Benchmarking Basket in fact placed South Africa's prices higher than any comparator country in the world.<sup>40</sup> And part of this problem is interconnection rates which increased by 500 per cent between 2001 and 2005<sup>41</sup> as a result of the lack of competition in the market. So while 77 per cent of South Africans may have access to a mobile phone, this statistic misleading. The costs of services, in the end, significantly limit how far the poor can actually use their mobile phones as an information source and a means of participation.

There are similar issues around the usefulness of mobile platforms as a way to hurdle the problems of internet access. First, the cost of smart phones gives rise to affordability issues for most South Africans. Although the quality of internet access via mobile phones is not the same as via computers. Costs of services and smart phones may drop, but "the size and functionality of mobile handsets means that people will not spend as much time browsing online or accessing the same kind of content as they do via PCs"<sup>42</sup>.

#### Policy for universal access – the fundamental flaw

Government policy and regulation point to a commitment to universal access:

- The Universal Services and Access Agency of South Africa (USAASA)<sup>43</sup> has a specific mandate around universal access to communications, seeking to promote networks and services, facilitate schemes and find new ways of attaining universal access.
- The Electronic Communications Act, 36 of 2005 (ECA), amongst other things, set out to legally open up the telecommunications market to competition in order to drive down prices. This saw the entry of some new entrants into the market. In 2010, the communications regulator - the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) - also enforced cuts in interconnection prices<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Internet users by race from: Afrographique, 2011

<sup>40</sup> OECD, 2006. *OECD Telecoms Price Benchmarking Baskets*, 2006, OECD [online] <http://www.oecd.org> [Accessed 28/09/2011]

<sup>41</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, p. 17

<sup>42</sup> Horner, L., 2011, *Freedom of Expression and the Internet: Report from Regional Consultation Meetings Convened by the Demos Institute*, Global Dialogue, p. 25, [online] [http://www.global-dialogue.eu/sites/global-dialogue.clients.homemadedigital.com/files/Freedom\\_of\\_Expression\\_and\\_the\\_Internet.pdf](http://www.global-dialogue.eu/sites/global-dialogue.clients.homemadedigital.com/files/Freedom_of_Expression_and_the_Internet.pdf) [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>43</sup> Under the *Electronic Communications Act*, 36 of 2005 (ECA).

<sup>44</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, p. 3

- In June 2010, the government released a national broadband policy that affirmed its commitment to universal access to broadband by 2019<sup>45</sup>.
- In the next couple of years three sub-Saharan African undersea cables will be completed. One already exists. The extra bandwidth that these provide is expected to significantly reduce the costs of broadband and boost South Africa towards universal access<sup>46</sup>.
- A joint government and private sector fund, The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA)<sup>47</sup>, targets historically marginalised groups to redress their exclusion and marginalisation from access to the media. In 2009-2010, MDDA granted a total of nearly R25.2 million (US\$ 3.6 million) to 36 community and small commercial radio, television and print media organisations<sup>48</sup>.

But as we've seen the government has so far fallen short in its quest to create universal access. This sheds doubt on the likelihood that the government will be able to bring about universal broadband access by 2019. What is more, the government has so far not stimulated enough competition into the sector to bring prices down enough.

A major source of the problem is that universal access finds itself competing with another government priority: the economy. After Apartheid, the government inherited a relatively mature business sector that needed a competitive and advanced telecommunications system to drive and support it.<sup>49</sup> South Africa's media and communications sector has, therefore, undergone a process of massive liberalisation. Economic liberalisation and universal access, though, don't necessarily go hand in hand. A big mistake that the government is making, therefore, is in assuming that a public-private relationship will succeed in driving universal access. The private sector is unlikely to invest in poor, rural areas because they are not considered lucrative markets. Until people replace the markets as a central concern – the right to access to information for all will not be realised.

### **11.2. Public Interest Communication**

South Africa has highly concentrated media and telecommunications sectors. Control is in the hands of a few big players, including the state itself. This has significant ramifications on the rights of South African citizens. Concentrated ownership of the media means that South Africans are exposed to limited diversity of opinion and content. It also gives the power to the few, to ultimately control an important space for freedom of expression. In the telecommunications market, concentration means limited competition which drives high prices. This is a core factor contributor to the low levels of access to and use of digital communications which we saw in the previous section. This in turn means that citizens are unable to use digital communications to create and generate content and participate in public debate.

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<sup>45</sup> Association for Progressive Change, October 2010. *Analysis of the broadband policy of South Africa*, APC [online] <http://www.apc.org/en/node/11294> [Accessed 30/08/2010]

<sup>46</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, pp. 13-16

<sup>47</sup> Established under the *Media Development and Diversity Agency Act*, 14 of 2002

<sup>48</sup> Media Development and Diversity Agency, 2010. *MDDA Annual Report 2009-2010*, MDDA [online] [http://www.mdda.org.za/MDDA%20Annual%20Report2009\\_2010%20.pdf](http://www.mdda.org.za/MDDA%20Annual%20Report2009_2010%20.pdf) [Accessed 28/09/2011]

<sup>49</sup> Siochru, S.O., 1996. *Telecommunications and Universal Service: International Experience in the Context of South African Policy Reform*, IDRC, Ottawa, p. 41

### 11.2.1. Media ownership

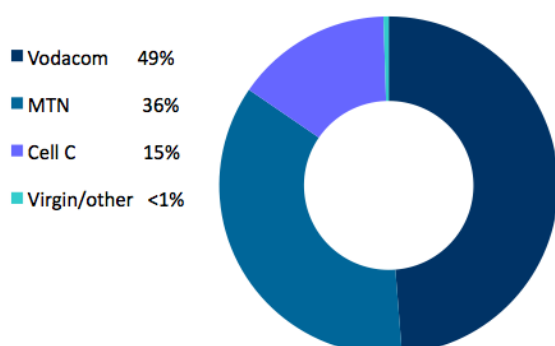
#### Telecommunications – competition and state vested interests

The Electronic Communications Act, 2005 – an attempt to facilitate and organise the rapid convergence of the broadcast and electronic communications sector - was a legal step towards opening up the telecoms sector to competition and restructuring it. In practice it has had little effect on the market. The government has only permitted a few new entrants and these have struggled to gain traction in a sector dominated by a few, vertically integrated players.

South Africa's fixed-line market has been dominated by Telkom giving rise to prohibitively high prices<sup>50</sup>. Neotel, entered into the market in 2006, but it has struggled to gain even 15 per cent of the market share and registered a loss in 2010<sup>51</sup>.

Figure 38<sup>52</sup>: Market share of mobile operators in South Africa

#### Market share of mobile operators in SA



As operator of the only undersea cable SAT3, Telkom has also had a monopoly on broadband. The arrival of Seacom, EASSy, MainOne and WACS in the last three years now puts Telekom in competition with mobile operators who have begun to provide broadband services<sup>53</sup>. Competition in the mobile market is not significantly different, with only three major

operators in South Africa's mobile market: Vodacom; MTN and the relatively weak entrant Cell C.

Until recently, the state also had increasing interests in the telecommunications sector. The government owned 37.7 per cent of the dominant fixed-line operator Telkom which in turn owned 50 per cent of the major mobile operator Vodacom. In 2009, though, the state reduced involvement and altered ownership structures. While it shed its 30 per cent ownership of fixed-line operator Neotel, the government still retains its stake in Telkom, with a reduced 14 per cent stake in

<sup>50</sup> Ponelis, S and J. Britz, 2008. To Talk or not to Talk? From Telkom to Hellkom: A Critical Reflection on the Current Telecommunications Policy in South Africa from a Social Justice Perspective, in *The International Information and Library Review*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 219-225

<sup>51</sup> A loss of R 1.1 billion in 2010: ADSL South Africa, 28 April 2011. Neotel's Plans to Take 15% of Telkom's Market Share, ADSL South Africa (Broadband South Africa), [online] <http://www.adslsouthafrica.co.za/neotel-plans-to-take-15-of-telkom-market-share.html> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

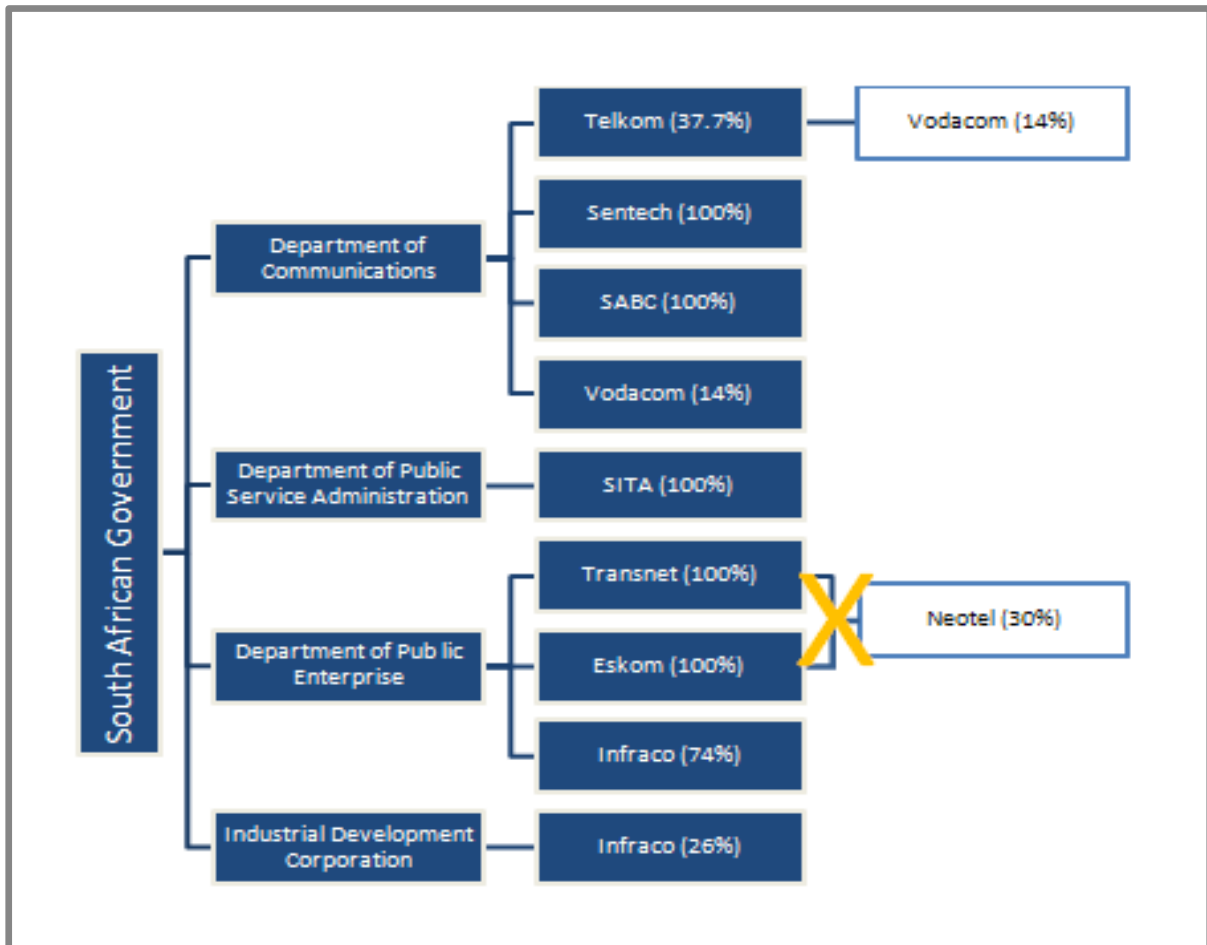
<sup>52</sup> Chart constructed from a variety of sources. MTN: MTN, 2010. MTN Annual Report 2010, [online] [http://www.mtn.com/Investors/Financials/Documents/ar\\_integrated\\_report2010.pdf](http://www.mtn.com/Investors/Financials/Documents/ar_integrated_report2010.pdf) [Accessed 29/08/2011] Vodacom: Private Source, 2011. *Vodacom Strategy Analytics: Wireless Operator Strategies (WOS)* Virgin: Razool, F., 31 August 2010. 'Virgin gives up on market share', ITWeb [online] [http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=36368:virgin-gives-up-on-market-share](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36368:virgin-gives-up-on-market-share) [Accessed 29/08/2011]

Cell C: Cell C, 2010. Cell C grows revenue, subscriber base, 2010, [online] <http://www.cellc.co.za/about/news> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>53</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, pp. 25-26

Vodacom<sup>54</sup>. It also actively increased its interests in the sector by creating Broadband Infraco to provide wholesale broadband services to service providers like Neotel.

Figure 39: The state's percentage stake in the telecommunications and media sector<sup>55</sup>

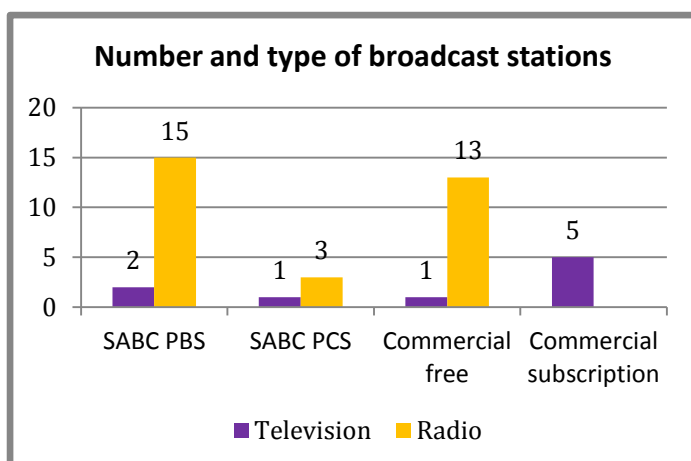


To put it simply, the social worth of digital communications is being directly undermined by a lack of competition and a number of vested interests in the telecoms sector. As already seen, the lack of competition has resulted in high prices that are preventing the majority of the population from accessing the internet with even less hope for broadband access. Mobile penetration may be high, but these high prices limit how much South Africans can actually use their phones. Social policies around universal access will not be given the precedence that they need so long as the government continues to have commercial interests in a telecoms market focused on profits.

<sup>54</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, p. 11

<sup>55</sup> Adapted from *Ibid*, p. 12

Figure 40<sup>56</sup>: Number and type of broadcast stations



### Concentration across the traditional media sector

South Africa's public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), is owned solely by the state and dominates the broadcast sector (Figure 40). The print sector in turn is dominated by four large groups who publish several newspaper and magazine titles: Avusa, CTY, Naspers and Independent Newspapers.

There is also substantial cross ownership across the traditional media sector. Naspers – with substantial ownership of print titles - also owns pay-TV stations MNet and DSTV, internet service provider MWeb, and social media platform MXit. Political ties and influence are also evident: Avusa Ltd – who leads in the daily and weekly newspaper market – is majority owned by ANC minister of human settlements, Tokyo Sexwale, through Mvelaphanda Holdings<sup>57</sup>.

Concentrated ownership of South Africa's media is having two profound effects on the media as a tool for accessing information and free expression. Firstly, it is threatening the existence of alternative voices in the media. Small independent commercial papers and free community newspapers find themselves in a daunting market, competing with South Africa's large daily and weekly papers. This is a constant threat to the sustainability of these community papers which frequently go out of print for this reason<sup>58</sup>. The commercial arm of the SABC has meant that the SABC now not only dominate audience numbers, but advertising too. It takes half of the overall advertising pie for broadcast and uses this revenue to subsidise the SABC's public wing<sup>59</sup>. This is a threat to smaller commercial and community broadcast media. Soweto TV, one of three fledgling community television stations, is struggling to capture advertising revenue from government and corporate companies. Private community radio stations have seen audience numbers boom in the last five years, but are experiencing similar problems<sup>60</sup>.

Secondly, concentrated ownership of the media limits the diversity and quality of content that South Africans are able to access<sup>61</sup>, which we will deal with in detail next.

<sup>56</sup> Lloyd and Duncan, 2010 pp. 20-21; and Z-Coms, 2009. *Trends of Ownership and Control of Media in South Africa*, Media Development and Diversity Agency, South Africa, p. 37

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> Z-Coms, 2009

<sup>59</sup> Esselaar, S. et al, 2010, p. 59; and C. Deacon, 6 June 2011. A perspective on public service broadcasting and the SABC, *The Media Online* [online] <http://themediainline.co.za/2011/06/a-perspective-public-service-broadcasting-and-the-sabc/> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>60</sup> Da Silva, I.S., 5 March 2010. *SA Media Ownership And Control Headache*, Biz-Community [online] <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003050580.html> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>61</sup> Freedom House, 2010. *Map of Press Freedom*, Freedom House [online] <http://freedomhouse.org/images/File/fop/2011/FOTP2011GlobalRegionalTables.pdf> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

### 11.2.2. Content Production

#### The crisis of diversity in South Africa's traditional media

There is certainly not reluctance to project diverse views, though: South Africa has a number of critical voices such as the Mail and Guardian or the Sunday Times. But concentrated ownership structures and a 'cosy relationship' between the media and vested interests, means that the media has a reputation for giving a large amount of coverage to conservative or reactionary views<sup>62</sup>.

The dominance of a public broadcaster is also worrying for media diversity. Especially given that the media accessed most by the majority of the population are radio and television. True, there is regulation of the public broadcaster around language and educational programming<sup>63</sup>. The aim of this is to create content that is diverse and relevant to the needs of all South Africans. But the profit-driven private media and the commercialisation of the SABC have meant that most content now caters for the needs of South Africa's more lucrative market – the minority middle class representing less than 15 per cent of South Africans<sup>64</sup>.

What this all signals is a clear need for alternative voices in South Africa, an issue that is not being helped by concentrated ownership. The need for alternative voices is recognised, though, and there has been a big drive by both the government and civil society to stimulate community radio across the country. But the problem of sustainability and a lack of skills to operate or contribute to community radio undermine its potential to be an alternative voice<sup>65</sup>. And then there are digital communications – widely seen as facilitators of these alternative voices. But in South Africa the question is – to what extent is it proving to do this?

#### Digital communications – new ways of producing content in South Africa

Digital communications do provide exciting spaces for citizens to create, impart and access a plethora of content and to engage in public debate. In this way, technology has opened up the bounds of what has been dubbed 'citizen journalism' allowing people in theory to expose those issues neglected by traditional media<sup>66</sup>.

South Africans are employing a range of new, individual mediums to create content. YouTube and South Africa's own MyVideo are being used by people to share content. The internet is allowing South Africans to create content for international as well as domestic consumption. South Africans, for example, regularly contribute to Pambazuka News, a Pan-African platform dedicated the opinions of Africans at home and in the diaspora.

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<sup>62</sup> Ashton, G., 2 August 2011. *South Africa: Murdoch, Mugabe, Malema And the Media*, The South African Civil Society Information Service, Johannesburg [online] <http://allafrica.com/stories/201108021470.html> [Accessed 29/08/2011]

<sup>63</sup> Lloyd and Duncan, 2010

<sup>64</sup> Alternative Information Development Centre, August 2010. *AIDC Statement on the threats to Press Freedom*, AIDC [online] [http://www.aidc.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=66:aidc-statement-aidc-statement-on-the-threats-to-press-freedom&catid=38:documents&Itemid=62](http://www.aidc.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66:aidc-statement-aidc-statement-on-the-threats-to-press-freedom&catid=38:documents&Itemid=62) [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>65</sup> Association for Progressive Change, 2009. *ICTs for Democracy*

<sup>66</sup> Sarrazin, T., 2011. *Texting, Tweeting, Mobile Internet: New Platforms for Democratic Debate in Africa* FESMedia, Namibia [online] <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/08343.pdf>, [Accessed 25/08/2011]

Social media is also an extremely active arena. Over 4.2 million South Africans are now on Facebook, but more successful than Facebook is South Africa's indigenous social networking site MXit, which has over 15 million users. The relatively small number of Twitter users - 55,000 – still generates 1.5 million tweets every year. South Africans are also number one in Africa's blogging sphere<sup>67</sup>. Afrigator and Gatorpeeps are the country's own blogs, while micro-blog aggregators generate blogs from personal thoughts (JNB Princess); to the kitchen (CookSister!); to news and opinions (Thought Leader, Woonkie Cartoons) to entertainment and hobbies (Running Wolf's Ran). Convergence of media combined with the advent of smart phones and cost-saving browsers for phones like Opera Mobile and Opera Mini, means that mobile phones are becoming the predominant mode for producing and engaging with these platforms<sup>68</sup>.

And beyond this, digital communications are actually positively strengthening South Africa's traditional media. Online publication - and the advertising revenues that comes with it – has allowed new business models for print media. This is particularly important for the struggling, independent publications that are not associated with the state or the big conglomerates like Avusa or Naspers. In 2009, business magazine, the Maverick closed its doors as a result of the global recession. Its editors turned their attention to publishing news and opinions online and set up the Daily Maverick, a quality, free online publication funded entirely by advertising revenues<sup>69</sup>. New media has also positively changed audiences' relationships with traditional media. The convergence of media platforms means audiences can access news and entertainment in different ways. They are also able to interact with content as most of the big newspapers in South Africa now have websites and mobile sites where readers can comment on articles. MyVideo also allows users to create channels for others to subscribe to, a feature increasingly being utilised by South Africa's bigger news publications<sup>70</sup>.

#### But are they really promoting an alternative voice?

In a developing country like South Africa, citizen journalism and the role of digital communications to enable is inhibited by a series of factors<sup>71</sup>. Access, skill, political consciousness, critical culture, all of this impacts on the ability of South Africans to become citizen journalists. Mainstream media outlets have co-opted 'citizen spaces'. Naspers media house, for example, owns blogs.news24.com, the largest blog platform in South Africa. It also owns MXit. The lines between citizen and mainstream are blurred, therefore, and there are few digital communications platforms that actually belong entirely to citizens<sup>72</sup>.

Then there are the issues around access and skills. The hub of activity described above is the activity of the minority of middle class South Africans living in South Africa's large metropolises. The cost and

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<sup>67</sup> Afrigator, *Blogs by country*, [online] <http://afrigator.com/blogstats/countries>, [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>68</sup> Verclas, K., 2008. *A Mobile Voice: The Use of Mobile Phones in Citizen Media*, MobileActive.org [online] <http://mobileactive.org/mobile-voice-use-mobile-phones-citizen-media> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

<sup>69</sup> Daily Maverick, *About us*, Daily Maverick, [online] <http://dailymaverick.co.za/page/about-us>, [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>70</sup> Sarrazin, 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Berger, G., 2011, Empowering the youth as citizen journalists: A South African experience, *Journalism* Vol. 12, No. 708, pp. 708-726

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

infrastructure of digital communications, combined with the lack of technical skills and know-how to use them, has created a significant digital divide in the country. The majority of South Africans, therefore, don't have the actual 'means to production'<sup>73</sup>. As with other media, social media activity is most concentrated in Johannesburg and Cape Town, for example, which combined, produce nearly double the tweets than the rest of the entire country<sup>74</sup>.

There are valuable initiatives in the country aimed at overcoming this barrier to citizen journalism. Voices of Africa trains mobile reporters in countries across the continent including South Africa and a partner company provides them with second hand mobile and camera phones<sup>75</sup>.

But one specific project demands attention: Iindaba Ziyafika (The News is Coming) is a project run by Rhodes University in Grahamstown in collaboration with Grocott's Mail, South Africa's oldest independent paper. The aim of this project is not just to promote the use of citizen media, but to promote a relationship between traditional and citizen media for greater diversity and a genuine culture of citizenship. At one level the project trained young South Africans in a range of different citizen journalism methods using a variety of platforms such as MXit. At another level, it created channels between Grocott's Mail – an English publication with a cover price that confined it to middleclass readers – and a local community radio station. These became outlets for the material generated in both English and isiXhosa by the young participants.

What the project showed is that a small amount of participation created a significant and diverse content that was relevant to a broad constituency. It also emphasised a considerable challenge. The quality of citizen journalism and desire to participate depended very much on people already being engaged with the issues. The fundamental challenge in promoting genuine alternative voices in South Africa, then, is not just to create access and build skills, but to deepen the 'consciousness of citizenship'<sup>76</sup>.

### **11.3. Digital Communications – Opportunities for Human Rights?**

It has been clear so far that for the majority of South Africans, digital communications remain a 'potential' tool towards realising their civil and political rights. Barriers to access have already been discussed. As have the challenges for alternative voices. This section now looks at developments and initiatives that use digital technologies to further human rights. And the question goes back to – how far do and can they succeed in this context?

#### **11.3.1. Homebred Innovation for Change**

South Africa's innovation drive is perhaps its most promising asset in terms of empowering its citizens and hurdling development challenges. What is striking is that this innovation is not just at

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Fuseware, 2010. *SA Twitter Report 2010: Analysis and Demographics of South African Twitter Usage*, Fuseware, [online] <http://www.fuseware.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/SA-Twitter-Report-2010.pdf>, [Accessed 25/08/2010]

<sup>75</sup> Sarrazin, 2011

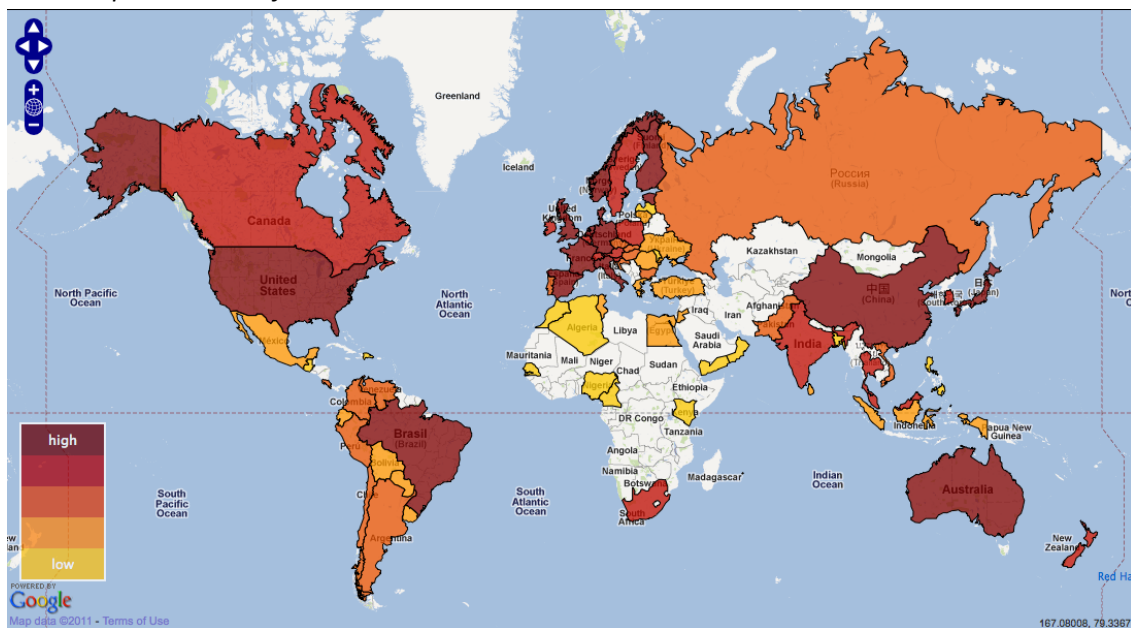
<sup>76</sup> Berger, 2011

the level of technological development, but in the way that this technology is being both adopted and adapted by South African society. A variety of different actors –the private sector, government, South Africa’s most technically savvy, academics, civil society – are all contributing.

### The open source wave in South Africa

To promote ICT innovation and entrepreneurship, the government and private sector have established a number of technology incubators and hubs including: Silicon Cape, Cape IT Initiative (CITI) and the Bandwidth Barn. South Africa is now a world leader in software development<sup>77</sup>. From a social perspective its open software contributions are particularly important. South Africa is now a close contender in open source contributions with other emerging economy countries like India and Brazil (Figure 41). Just as important as the free and open source software (FOSS) itself, are the initiatives to proactively distribute this software and to make it accessible for as many South Africans as possible. Translate.org.za works on the localisation of FOSS into the 11 official languages of South Africa. Translations include: GNOME, KDE, OpenOffice.org, Firefox and Thunderbird<sup>78</sup>. Freedom Toaster - funded by the Shuttleworth Foundation, the same man behind the open source operating system Ubuntu - is a means of getting FOSS out to as many South Africans as possible. Freedom Toaster is ‘a content vending machine-like kiosk’<sup>79</sup> allowing users to burn FOSS onto CDs or DVDs<sup>80</sup>.

Figure 41: Open source software contributions around the world<sup>81</sup>



### Tools and platforms – by South Africans for South Africans

<sup>77</sup> Tande, D., 2011. *Information and Communications Technology in South Africa - An Overview*, Global Initiatives in Management (GIM), Kellogg School of Management [online] <http://www.slideshare.net/dibussi/information-and-communications-technology-in-south-africa-slideshare-version> [Accessed 25/08/2010]

<sup>78</sup> Translate.org.za [online] <http://translate.org.za/> [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>79</sup> The Freedom Toaster [online] <http://www.freedomtoaster.org/about-us/our-history/> [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>81</sup> RedHat, 2008. *Open Source Activity Map*, RedHat, [online] <http://www.redhat.com/about/where-is-open-source/activity/> [Accessed 14/09/2011]

There are also a number of other indigenous platforms, applications and tools including: mobile video platforms Zoopy and MyVideo; Yola, a free web-site building platform; and blogging and micro-blogging platforms Afrigator and Gatorpeeps. The country's social networking platform MXit is versatile and well-suited to the South African context. It had an early focus on instant messenger (IM) chat giving South Africans a cheaper option than SMS to send messages. It also relies on phones and not computers, thus making it more accessible for more South Africans<sup>82</sup>. Because of its membership base, the platform is also being used by organisations to deliver services and provide drug counselling to users and HIV/AIDS services.

### ***11.3.2. Towards Voice and Socio-Economic Rights being realised in South Africa***

#### Voice on the internet

The internet creates an enabling platform for exercising a variety of rights including: the right to access information; the right to freedom of expression; the right to freedom of association. As such it is a space with the potential to empower and give voice to marginalised groups in South Africa. The internet allows them a way to access relevant information and knowledge; connect to people via virtual communities and networks; to create their own content and stories in their own ways; and to build skills and capacity. The aim of Women's Net in South Africa is to empower women by doing all of these things. Its project, 'Women and Elections', set out to inform women about the election from a gender perspective through a number of different online activities. In South Africa one particular group being given voice and space is the LGBTI group. A study of transgender and lesbian South Africans highlighted the significance of the internet as a space to inform on LGBTI issues. It has also enabled a community in which transpeople can develop and perform their identity, free from judgement in a society where they feel the need to hide themselves.

The internet has significant potential for activists and marginalised groups to transcend their national borders and strengthen their voice by connecting with the rest of the world. It has enabled Women's Net to advocate on an international scale. South Africa is one of the most progressive countries in Africa on gay and transpeople rights and so in this respect the internet has enabled them to connect to the strong LGBTI international movement<sup>83</sup>, and to advocate and connect with the fight for LGBTI rights in African states where homosexuality remains illegal.

#### A mode of service delivery for realising socio-economic rights

In South Africa the delivery of services via ICTs, particularly mobile phones, has been a stronger focus than initiatives to promote voice and participation. The government has attempted to use ICTs as a means to jump the infrastructural barriers to development. NGOs, CSOs and community organisations have in turn used ICTs to plug the large gaps in government service delivery. The plethora of projects highlight the extent to which technologies can and are being used and adapted to reach poorer South Africans with vital services.

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<sup>82</sup> TNW Africa, 14 June 2011. *Why mobile social network MXit is twice as big as Facebook in South Africa*, TNW Africa, [online] <http://thenextweb.com/africa/2011/06/14/why-mobile-social-network-mxit-is-twice-as-big-as-facebook-in-south-africa/> [Accessed 26/08/2011]

<sup>83</sup> Prinsloo, J., N. McClean, R. Molestane, 2011. The internet and sexual identities: Exploring transgender and lesbian use of the internet in South Africa, in Jac sm Kee (ed.), 2011. *EROTICS: Sex, rights and the internet - An exploratory research study*, Association for Progressive Change, pp. 135-175, [online] <http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/EROTICS.pdf> [Accessed 13/09/2011]

- **Education:** The Department of Education's draft white paper on e-education in 2003<sup>84</sup> has brought about a series of e-education and e-learning initiatives in South Africa. There has been a big drive to get ICT infrastructure and internet access to schools across South Africa at all levels of education. Projects include: Telkom Super Centres, SchoolNet South Africa, and Gauteng online. A recent initiative includes eKhaya which is running a pilot in Eastern Cape with the vision to establish ICT centres in village schools<sup>85</sup>. Research into ICTs for education, such as that done by the Meraka Institute, is also being undertaken to complement and inform these initiatives.
- **Health:** South Africa has both a poor health infrastructure and high rates of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. This reality, combined with high mobile usage means that mobiles are a prime tool for assisting in more effective delivery of health services to the poor. Appointment reminders via SMS by Project Masilekule have led to a drop from 30 to 4 per cent in missed appointments. Cell-life, which collaborates with the National AIDS Helpline, connects nurses and carers with HIV/AIDS patients in their own homes. One of their services is to send reminders to take anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs), which is particularly important in ensuring the effectiveness of ARVs. In a country where there is still enormous stigma around HIV/AIDS, mobiles also provide a personal and private means of counselling people cheaply. MXit is increasingly used as a counselling and information platform on various health and social issues. One example is the Drug Advice Support (DAS) which has now expanded to other issues such as rape and child abuse. Red and RedChatZone are Cell-life initiatives which use MXit to provide information on HIV/AIDS and counselling. Between September 2009 and April 2011, 1.6 million pages of content were viewed and 59,000 people had Red as a contact on their profiles.
- **Employment and income:** The Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda), an agency of the South African Department of Trade and Industry, uses Freedom Toasters to distribute business information, templates, software and success stories to assist small and medium enterprises. Uusi gives members of the mobile network access to employment and education opportunities.
- **Mobile Banking:** There are 13 million 'unbanked' in South Africa. Mobile banking provides them with the ability to deposit, transfer and withdraw funds via their mobile phone. In South Africa, mobile banking is frequently used for the transfer of money to the rural poor<sup>86</sup>. Wizzit, compatible with early generation phones, is used by low-income households, and issues account holders with a Maestro card which can be used in shops and at ATMs to withdraw funds. South Africa now has a wide variety of mobile-banking products with M-Pesa, a product developed by Safaricom in Kenya, launched in the country in 2010<sup>87</sup>.

### 11.3.3. Challenges for Digital Communications

<sup>84</sup> 2003. *Draft White Paper on e-Education: Transforming Learning and Teaching through ICT*, Department of Education, [online] <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=68777> [Accessed 13/09/2011]

<sup>85</sup> eKhaya, About Us, ekhayaict.com [online] <http://ekhayaict.com/About-Us>, [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>86</sup> Bångens, L., and B. Söderberg, 2008. *Mobile Banking – Financial Services for the Unbanked?*, Spider Center Sweden [online] [http://www.spidercenter.org/files/m-banking\\_study.pdf](http://www.spidercenter.org/files/m-banking_study.pdf), [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>87</sup> Tande, D., 2011

### Inequalities mean digital communications have limited use for social movements

There is a recurrent theme in this chapter of chronic social inequality and a lack access to digital communications and the skills to use them. As long as fundamental inequalities are a barrier to the use of digital technologies, we must be realistic about how far digital communications can help to bring about social change. Social movements are using digital communications to mobilise, organise themselves and make demands around a variety of civil-political and socio economic rights. Two prominent and relatively successful social movements in South Africa are Abahlali BaseMondjolo (Shackdwellers Movement) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). Abahlali campaigns around housing and land rights employing a strategy of road blockades and marches.<sup>88</sup> The TAC is a campaign for the right to health and equal access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services. It uses a combination of litigation, human rights education, HIV/AIDS treatment literacy and demonstrations as its mobilisation tactics. Both have been successful in achieving some of their aims. These movements use digital technologies to communicate their agendas and news, to raise awareness in domestic and international quarters, to advertise activities and demonstrations, and to share stories. But while the internet, social media platforms and SMS are clearly important tools, they are not the central backbone. The core membership of these movements is at the bottom end of the digital divide without access to sanitation let alone digital technologies. It also highlights that mass and spontaneous informal movement for change as in the Arab Spring is unlikely to happen soon in South Africa.

### E-participation – the need to foster meaningful engagement with government

The example of political parties in South Africa using SMS and social networking to communicate with their supporters ahead of the 2009 elections<sup>89</sup> is much flaunted. But e-participation and e-democracy initiatives have proven limited in their ability to stimulate real and meaningful participation in political processes<sup>90</sup>.

There are a number of reasons for this. The concept of engagement is neglected from the start: national and local e-governance initiatives use ICTs for service delivery rather than collaborative and interactive dialogue - 'a one-way transfer of information'<sup>91</sup>. In fact, many officials interpret direct

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<sup>88</sup> Abahlali BaseMondjolo, *Introduction*, Abahlali BaseMondjolo, [online] <http://www.abahlali.org/> [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>89</sup> Banks, K., *Mobile applications database*, Kiwanja [online] [http://www.kiwanja.net/database/kiwanja\\_searchdetails.php?id=53](http://www.kiwanja.net/database/kiwanja_searchdetails.php?id=53) [Accessed 14/09/2011]

<sup>90</sup> Project for Conflict Resolution and Development, and eKhaya ICT, 2011. *Study into the Potential to Utilize Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) to Promote Inclusion, Public Participation and Accountability in Local Governance*, Local Government ICT Network [online] <http://lgict.org.za/document/study-potential-utilize-information-and-communication-technologies-ict%E2%80%99s-promote-inclusion-> [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>91</sup> Twinomurizi, H., 2007, *An e-collaboration approach to buy-in of development innovations in rural communities: A South African experience*, Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, São Paulo, Brazil; Meerman, S., 2010. *Opportunities and Challenges for e-Government in S. Africa*. State Information Technology Agency, Presentation at the ISAD Mutli-Stakeholder Forum, South Africa; and Public Service Commission, 2010. *Report on the Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Thusong Service Centres in Integrated Service Delivery*, Public Service Commission, [online] <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=135466> [Accessed 15/09/2011]

engagement with citizens as undermining local government rather than as a way to strengthen democracy and accountability<sup>92</sup>. At the citizen end, there is also a limited participatory culture particularly with the poor and marginalised. And as we have already seen an existing sense of citizenship is important<sup>93</sup>. E-participation has also been hampered by the recurrent problem of access and literacy. The 24 worst connected municipalities in South Africa have only 3 per cent internet penetration and 6 per cent computer use<sup>94</sup>. Until recently, many of the government's more remote Thusong Centres (information centres) had no internet connectivity<sup>95</sup>. At the beginning of 2010, 20 per cent remained unconnected<sup>96</sup>. As well as a large degree of ICT illiteracy, there has been little done to make the actual content of government information accessible. Poor and marginalised South Africans do not have sufficient levels of education or language skills. And finally, e-participation does not work where local government lacks the institutional capacity and maturity to respond to citizens. Investment cannot just be into the technologies and skills building, but needs to be put into municipal institutions as well<sup>97</sup>.

#### Identity and culture do not always fit

It cannot be assumed that South Africans will necessarily be keen to embrace digital communications. There are other factors around power and identity that can limit how far digital communications can be used as a tool to promote and protect rights<sup>98</sup>. The failed UmNyango SMS campaign is an example of why these factors need to be considered. The campaign was aimed at empowering women through SMS by raising awareness about domestic violence and land exclusions and encouraging women to report abuses of their rights using SMS. But the project failed to increase women's participation because there was general distrust in the technology and an unwillingness to confide in strangers. The financial costs to both the NGO and to local women were also high. Other forms of activism more suitable to the local context could have had greater success<sup>99</sup>.

#### No concrete evidence

What is striking is how little is actually known about the extent to which digital communications can empower in South Africa. There is anecdotal evidence, but there is no proper measurement of what the impacts on empowerment are. This dearth of knowledge needs filling. The recent Siyakhula Living Labs project is a concerted effort to do this. It is a multi-stakeholder initiative involving South Africa's academia, public and private sectors and South Africa's users themselves. The project is seeking to generate user-driven innovations that are relevant in rural contexts and using a variety of communications technologies. Empowerment to realise socio-economic rights is the ultimate end of the project. The project recognises that marginalised communities do not just need access to the

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<sup>92</sup> PCRD and eKhaya ICT, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Razool, F. 22 March 2011, *Thusong centres can't tackle ICT*, ITWeb, [online]

[http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=42220:thusong-centres-cant-tackle-ict](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=42220:thusong-centres-cant-tackle-ict) [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>96</sup> Mphindi, H., 2008. *Digital Divide and e-governance in South Africa*, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa, [online] [http://www.ais.up.ac.za/digi/docs/mp hindi\\_paper.pdf](http://www.ais.up.ac.za/digi/docs/mp hindi_paper.pdf) [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>97</sup> PCRD and eKhaya ICT, 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Horner, 2011

<sup>99</sup> Naidoo, A. 2010. The UmNyango project: using SMS for political participation in rural KwaZulu Natal, in S. Ekine, 2010. *SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa*, Pambazuka Press, Oxford, pp.71-85

internet, but a combination of specialised services as well so that the internet can match community needs. Services include micro-financing, transport, collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge. At the same time, the project is focusing on finding models that make this infrastructure sustainable, important when considering economic empowerment<sup>100</sup>. The Living Labs method is based around constant collaboration, research and trial and error, and long-term commitment. This approach gives us a much deeper understanding of what peoples' needs actually are and how far digital communications can and is helping to deliver on them.

#### E-services should compliment service delivery

While the plethora of projects using digital communications to deliver services is exciting, there is also a chronic lack of coordination and comprehensive strategy between the various stakeholders. There is scope for a more targeted and consolidated approach based on what is actually working. Also the costs and therefore sustainability of these initiatives are high. There is, of course, also a danger that the hype and innovation may focus attention on e-services rather than investment into a permanent and efficient service infrastructure for the country. E-services must complement not replace traditional service delivery.

#### Economy over the people... again

The government's commitment to innovation is clear with a several policies to facilitate and utilise it, such as the: 1996 National System of Innovation in 1996; the 2002 National Research and Development Strategy; the Technology Innovation Act 2008; the National Innovation Plan 2008-2018; the Information Society and Development (ISAD) Strategic Plan 2010-2013; the Meraka Advanced Institute for Information and Communication Technology. The overall aim is to "establish South Africa as an advanced information-based society in which information and ICT tools are key drivers of economic and societal development"<sup>101</sup>. But as is the case elsewhere, there appears to be a large discrepancy between vision and policy, and delivery and implementation<sup>102</sup>. In June 2011, for example, ISAD – which aims to establish South Africa as an 'advanced information society' - had been rolled out in only two provinces, showing limited uptake of the strategy<sup>103</sup>. In some cases policy is also contradictory. In 2010 the government somewhat undermined its 2007 open source policy with a teacher laptop initiative that excluded open source options in favour of Microsoft products<sup>104</sup>. What is more, national strategy around innovation seems to primarily focus on becoming a world leader in technological innovation. And the primary objective of this is economic. Socio-economic development is expected to be spurred on by this economic growth. In short, the government's commitment to innovation once again seems to have an economic focus rather than a direct focus on its people.

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<sup>100</sup> Siyakula Living Lab, *Project Activities*, Siyakula Living Lab, [online] <http://siyakulall.org/> [Accessed 15/09/2011]

<sup>101</sup> South Africa's Information Society and Development (ISAD) Strategic Plan 2010-2013, in B. Akpor and M. Muchie, 2011. *Assessment of Environmental, Institutional and Individual Leadership Capacity Needs for the Knowledge Society in South Africa: A Situational and Needs Analysis*, GESCI, Nairobi, p. 7, [online] [http://www.gesci.org/assets/files/KS-southafrica\\_01072011\[2\].pdf](http://www.gesci.org/assets/files/KS-southafrica_01072011[2].pdf) [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>104</sup> Otter, A. 16 July 2010. *SA education department's laptop initiative snubs open source policy*, Tectonic, [online] <http://www.tectonic.co.za/?p=5291> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

## 11.4. Controlling the Media

### Media freedom - down a slippery slope

The foundations of post-Apartheid South Africa lay very much in its very progressive and democratic media legislation and policy based on the right to freedom of expression. This was the work of civil society organisations, media NGOs and the ANC itself over a period of decades<sup>105</sup>. Less than two decades on South Africa's media finds its freedoms are being curtailed. In 2010, the country dropped in the Freedom House Press Freedom Index from 'free' to 'partly free'<sup>106</sup>. Hostile official rhetoric against critical voices in the media is increasing; the SABC is fast losing its 'independent' image; and there are a number of dangerous and draconian legislative efforts threatening the media. The ANC's treatment of the media in recent years looks more and more like 'a return to the era of draconian censorship'<sup>107</sup>.

### The power to silence

The relationship between the government and media is increasingly negative. This is highlighted by a recent drive for self-serving and restrictive legislation by the ANC.

Since 2007, the government has been threatening to establish a Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT) for monitoring the media despite the fact that there are a number of self-regulatory and working bodies to do this<sup>108</sup>. The proposed MAT would introduce formal censorship to print media. It would be answerable to parliament and would have the power to imprison or fine journalists for inaccurate reporting<sup>109</sup>.

A more urgent worry, though, is the Protection of Information Bill (POIB), dubbed the 'Secrecy Bill'. The POIB makes it a punishable offence - of up to 25 years in prison - for the media to possess or publish any 'classified' document<sup>110</sup>. After several redrafts in response to mass media and public outcry, it still – as the A2K campaign puts it - 'fails the Freedom Test'<sup>111</sup>. In September 2011, the ANC majority voted to block amendments to the bill that would protect the media and whistleblowers.

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<sup>105</sup> Fourie, P.J., 2010. *Lecture on the struggle for freedom of expression to the Department of Communication Science at Unisa*, [online] <http://bigmediadebate.blogspot.com/p/lecture-by-prof-pj-fourie-struggle-for.html> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>106</sup> Freedom House, 2010. *Freedom of the Press: South Africa*, Freedom House [online] <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010> [Accessed 16/09/2011]; Freedom House, 2009. *Freedom of the Press: South Africa*, Freedom House [online] <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>107</sup> Fourie, 2010

<sup>108</sup> Including The Press Council, the Press Ombudsman, SANEF, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) and the various government regulatory bodies

<sup>109</sup> NGO Pulse, August 2010. *Recent Developments in the South African Media Landscape*, NGO Pulse [online] <http://www.ngopulse.org/press-release/recent-developments-south-african-media-landscape-0> [Accessed 16/09/2011]; Alternative Information Development Centre, 2010

<sup>110</sup> Alternative Information Development Centre, 2010

<sup>111</sup> Amandla, 15 September 2011. *The Secrecy Bill still fails the Freedom Test!*, Amandla [online] <http://www.communitymedia.org.za/communication-activist-network/267-the-secrecy-bill-still-fails-the-freedom-test-> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

On 22 November 2011 – a day nicknamed ‘Black Tuesday’ – Parliament passed the POIB. The Bill is now awaiting President Zuma’s signature before it is made into law.<sup>112</sup>

Both MAT and POIB, if seen through, will substantially undermine the role of the media in ensuring transparency and accountability in South Africa. They would also act to curtail free media and the rights to access of information and freedom of expression for all South Africans<sup>113</sup>.

There are a number of other less draconian laws that also undermine South African’s right to access information. The 2004 Law on Antiterrorism allows authorities to compel journalists to reveal sources, and to restrict information about the police, national defence forces, mental institutions and prisons<sup>114</sup>. The hurried draft amendment to the Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2 of 2000 (PAIA) has failed to respond to calls to gain access through a regulatory body rather than the courts. Using the courts is a costly and time consuming process that the majority of South Africans cannot afford<sup>115</sup>.

#### Political interference

There are concerns that the several examples of political interference and attempts by the government to increase its legal control over the SABC signal a threat to media freedom. In 2009, the SABC’s board was dismissed and replaced with an interim board in attempts to restore its independence and fix the US \$100 million loss from the previous financial year. But it remains accused of being a voice piece for the government<sup>116</sup>. And in early 2011, the South African high court ruled that ICASA relaunch an investigation into political interference in the SABC in 2006 to blacklist four critical commentators from the SABC’s news and current affairs programmes<sup>117</sup>.

The 2009 Public Service Broadcasting Bill gave considerable power to the Minister of Communications over the day-to-day management of the SABC<sup>118</sup>. In the same year, the then president, Kgalema Motlanthe refused to sign the Broadcasting Amendment Act because it gave Parliament the power to dismiss SABC board members and the entire SABC board<sup>119</sup>. The Act that was eventually passed requires ‘due inquiry’ by the National Assembly before a dismissal is made<sup>120</sup>,

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<sup>112</sup> Al Jazeera, 22 November 2011. *S Africa adopts contentious 'secrecy bill'*, Al Jazeera [online] <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/11/2011112211944734532.html> [Accessed 25/11/2011]

<sup>113</sup> Fourie, 2010

<sup>114</sup> Freedom House. 2010. *Freedom of the Press: South Africa*, Freedom House [online] <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010> [Accessed 26/08/2011]

<sup>115</sup> Esselaar et al, 2010, p. 15;

and South African History Archive, 26 January 2011. *Amendment to the Promotion of Access to Information Act*, SAHA [online]

[http://www.saha.org.za/news/2011/January/amendment\\_to\\_the\\_promotion\\_of\\_access\\_to\\_information\\_act.htm](http://www.saha.org.za/news/2011/January/amendment_to_the_promotion_of_access_to_information_act.htm), [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>116</sup> Ashton, 2011

<sup>117</sup> The Citizen, 27 January 2011, *Cosatu welcomes SABC ruling*, The Citizen [online]

<http://www.citizen.co.za/citizen/content/en/citizen/local-news?oid=167759&sn=Detail&pid=146864&Cosatu-welcomes-SABC-ruling>, [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>118</sup> Alternative Information Development Centre, 2010

<sup>119</sup> Freedom House. 2010

<sup>120</sup> South African Government, 2010. No. 4 of 2009: Broadcasting Amendment Act, 2009, Government Gazette, [online]

still giving the government an amount of power. It is very clear that its legal grip on the SABC is tightening. Whether intentional or not, it is also worth noting that the government is increasing its control of a dominant public broadcaster which was made dominant by the government's own regulation and policy in the sector.

#### A culture of hostility towards the media

Freedom of expression is also being challenged by the intolerance and intimidation of the media in South Africa, particularly by political figures. The media has found itself the victim of a number of gagging orders and court interdictions. At least three gagging orders have been brought against the Mail and Guardian since 2005 to prevent reporting on corruption scandals<sup>121</sup>. In 2010, Sunday Times journalist Mzilikazi wa Afrika was arrested the day after he wrote a story alleging irregularities in tender proceedings by the police. Political cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro was also taken to court for defamation over his critical representations of President Zuma. In a positive bid for freedom of expression, the court ruled in favour of Shapiro, saying that, "his cartoons expressed 'free, open, robust and even unrestrained criticism of politicians by a journalist' and had stimulated 'valuable political debate' "<sup>122</sup>. But the case symbolises the extent to which the president respects freedom of expression in his country.

Aside from attacks in the courts, other tactics against the media have been used, including government threats to cut advertising in papers reporting on corruption<sup>123</sup>. ANC Youth League, Julius Malema and his spokesperson Floyd Shiyambu are well known for their anti-media tirades. Shiyambu led a targeted smear campaign accusing specific journalists of bribery. And Malema's supporters also recently took to throwing stones and bottles at journalists and assaulting female journalists who were reporting on protests around his disciplinary hearing<sup>124</sup>.

#### Censoring digital communications

The government's control of the digital sphere is also an important indicator of threats to citizens' freedoms. In South Africa, digital communications are actually a relatively uncontrolled space for people to exercise their rights to access information and free expression. Unlike its press freedom status, South Africa's internet freedom status is 'free'<sup>125</sup>. There is currently no blocking and filtering of content other than for pornography, but there is still scope for concern.

In terms of surveillance, there is legislation that gives potential to extensively monitor digital communications. To date this has not been implemented, but the concern remains. ISPs are required

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<http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/wcm/connect/2c8a678045bc79b2ba5dbf2a2c69d975/Bcast+Amendment+Act+2009.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=2c8a678045bc79b2ba5dbf2a2c69d975> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>121</sup> Freedom House. 2010

<sup>122</sup> Reid, J. 2010. *A war on media freedoms in South Africa? Why must we worry about the Media Appeals Tribunal and the Protection of Information Bill?* Royal African Society [online]

<http://www.royalafricansociety.org/country-profiles/699.html?task=view>, [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>123</sup> Freedom House, 2010. *Freedom of the Press: South Africa*, Freedom House [online]

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2010> [Accessed 26/08/2011];

<sup>124</sup> Leadership Online, 6 September 2011. *SA politicians, officials set tone for public animosity*, <http://www.leadershiponline.co.za/articles/politics/1535-media-freedom> [Accessed 16/09/2011]

<sup>125</sup> Freedom House, 2011. *Freedom on the Net, 2011: South Africa*, Freedom House [online] <http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/FotN/SouthAfrica2011.pdf> [Accessed 25/08/2011]

to retain customer data indefinitely under the Regulation of Interception of Communications Act 2002 (RICA). And the same act bans internet systems that cannot be monitored<sup>126</sup>. Building monitoring capabilities like this into the system is dangerous because it also leaves users' personal data more open to attackers<sup>127</sup>. In addition to surveillance legislation, there has also been some monitoring of SMS and conversations on mobile phones. The National Communications Centre has the ability to intercept and record domestic and international conversations using keyword monitoring. And the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act (RICA), requires ISPs to register identities and addresses of all SIM card users<sup>128</sup>. While the aim of these exercises is to protect South Africans from national security threats, citizens are subject to having their conversations listened to without a court order<sup>129</sup> and this can leave activists and human rights defenders vulnerable to harassment and persecution. In doing this, it may also create a chilling effect where people are afraid to use mobile phones to speak out freely. There is also the increasing potential for censorship. The 2009 Film and Publications Amendment Act, for example, requires any non-recognised publisher to submit any broadcast material for censorship. This applies to digital as well as traditional spaces and affects content created by non-mainstream citizen journalists and broadcasters<sup>130</sup> giving scope for censorship of these alternative voices.

While there is no blocking and no real political censorship of content, there is increasing concern that threats to freedoms in the traditional media realm have the potential to extend to the digital realm. Social-networking sites could be particularly susceptible to defamation cases, for example. Cases in the traditional media might set a precedent that would limit free speech online. Civil laws are already being applied to online content. In the case of Natasha Tschilas - a South African football team manager who sued Touch Line Media for defamatory comments posted on their website Kick Off – the courts ruled against Tschilas on the basis that monitoring and censoring material on the host's site would be a curtailment of the right to freedom of expression<sup>131</sup>. In this respect, the South Africa courts so far have demonstrated a balanced regard for protecting individual rights at the same time as leaving freedom of expression intact.

The above case highlights how the issue of intermediary liability can encourage censorship. As in the USA, South African ISPs are held liable for content only where they have knowledge and control over it. The Electronic Communications and Transactions Act (2002) requires ISPs to respond to and take-down content once a take-down notice is received, but does not oblige them to monitor activity<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>127</sup> Electronic Frontier Foundation, *CALEA - The perils of wiretapping the Internet*, Electronic Frontier Foundation [online] <http://www.eff.org/issues/calea> [Accessed 25/09/2011]

<sup>128</sup> Helkom, 2011. *Rica Registration - How to register your SIM card*, Helkom [online] <http://www.hellkom.co.za/pages/rica-sim-card-registration.php> [Accessed 25/09/2011]

<sup>129</sup> Monare, M., 24 August 2008. *Every call you take, they'll be watching you*, IOL News [online] <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/every-call-you-take-they-ll-be-watching-you-1.413629> [Accessed 19/09/2011]

<sup>130</sup> Freedom House, 2010

<sup>131</sup> O'Brien, N.D. 2010. *The liability of Internet Service Providers for Unlawful Content Posted by Third Parties*, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University [online] <http://www.nmmu.ac.za/documents/theses/N.D.%20O%E2%80%99BRIEN.pdf> [Accessed 19/09/2011]; and Freedom House, 2011.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*

Protection from liability may protect ISPs, but it also puts them under substantial pressure to remove content without exploring the truth of allegations. In South Africa, this could lead to indirect political censorship by powerful players especially given the current attacks on critical media.

The Law Commission is still considering a bill to regulate pornography on the internet and cell phones. Consensual adult pornography is legal in South Africa, but the bill in its current form will make any ISP or mobile operator guilty of an offence if they distribute or allow the distribution of pornography<sup>133</sup>. Furthermore, the bill is drawn up by the Justice Alliance of South Africa (JASA) - an anti-gay, anti-choice organisation - and it promotes state censorship along those lines<sup>134</sup>.

It is clear that while the internet might be considered the freest medium in South Africa at the moment, there is built-in potential for both surveillance and censorship so that this freedom is precariously balanced. As access increases, the internet as a free space will become increasingly important and as such it needs to be kept free.

### **11.5. Conclusions**

Media and communications have a significant role to play in facilitating the civil and socio-economic rights of South Africans. The majority of South Africans, for instance, have access to some form of offline media and it remains a vital source of information. There is also clear potential in the realm of digital communications. The internet currently provides the freest space to express opinion and access information and mobile phone penetration has boomed. At the same time, there is homebred innovation drive that is exciting both in terms of what is being created and how it is being used at the local level. Civil society and activists are using digital communications increasingly to inform and mobilise. And mobile phones are providing cheap and personal means for filling service delivery gaps.

But at the same time, the potential of media and communications is being undermined by some serious challenges. South Africa's media is being attacked from all sides with hostile political rhetoric from the top; increasing state control over the public broadcaster; and legislation that threatens freedom of expression and access to information. The power of digital communications to empower is also weakened by low levels of access to the internet and prices that limit the extent to which mobile phones can be used. With state vested interests in the communications sector, government policy and regulation have so far failed to bring prices down or stimulate infrastructure investment in remote areas. There is also a clear need for alternative voices: a concentrated media is impinging on diversity of content and opinion, community radio currently remains weak and access issues restrict digital communications as a viable space. And low levels of education and ICT skills mean that even those with access to digital communications are limited in their ability to actually use

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<sup>133</sup> Jones, C. 1 June 2010. *Porn Bill is 'unconstitutional'*, ITWeb [online] [http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=33632:porn-bill-is-unconstitutional](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33632:porn-bill-is-unconstitutional) [Accessed 19/09/2011]

<sup>134</sup> Shackleton, S-J., 6 July 2010, *South Africa and online pornography: Bill sets off alarm bells in women's movement*, APC News, [online] <http://www.apc.org/en/news/south-africa-and-online-pornography-bill-sets-alar> [Accessed 15/09/2011]

them. South Africa, though, also faces a larger problem: a crisis of citizenship. For digital communications to properly contribute to overcoming this problem, they must become more than a mere one-way channel of communication between government and citizens.

#### The way forward

- *Continuing investment in important offline media: while rates of access to the internet still remain low, offline media are crucial sources of information for the majority of South Africans. Digital communications provide exciting opportunities for funders, but continued investment in offline media remains important.*
- *Developing internet and broadband infrastructure to increase access: the government and regulators need to create a series of fiscal incentives to encourage the private sector to develop infrastructure in less lucrative, remote areas. There first needs to be research into the most appropriate fiscal incentives for the South African context.*
- *Driving costs down: civil society needs to take up South Africa's high internet, broadband and mobile costs as a human rights issue, putting pressure on the government, the independent regulators and the private sector.*
- *The government and regulators also need more proactive measures to bring prices down, rather than relying on competition. Again, there needs to be research into the various options including: bandwidth sharing between mobile operators; lowering duties on devices; and cross-subsiding tariffs. If the government lacks the initiative, research could be commissioned by civil society and the private sector.*
- *Changing attitudes to engagement: if digital communications are to provide an effective two-way channel of communication between government and citizens, the focus needs to be on more than the citizen. Local government needs training on modes of dialogue and to understand the benefits of meaningful engagement with their constituents.*
- *Making the information relevant: alongside government and civil society digital initiatives, there should be a focus on the accessibility of the information itself and not just the tools. Relevant websites need to be translated into local languages. Alternative ways of presenting information, such as audio and visual tools, should also be used especially in areas with low literacy. Information needs to be made locally relevant too.*
- *Pro-poor innovations: despite more exciting advances in technologies, investors and developers must continue to create platforms and applications for older, second generation phones still used by the majority.*
- *Both government and civil society should also ramp up efforts to distribute FOSS and make them accessible in languages other than English.*
- *Understanding the effectiveness of digital communications: there needs to be rigorous and long-term research into how far digital communications are leading to socio-economic empowerment and how effective they are in service delivery.*
- *Investment into digital communications literacy: any digital initiatives need to go hand in hand with skills and training to use digital communications. These skills also need to be easily adaptable as technologies and applications change and advance.*
- *Making space for alternative voices: rather than treating alternative voices as a separate to the media, new ways of integrating alternative voices into traditional media systems need to be found. As with lindaba Ziyafika, projects should work with citizens as well as established*

*media outlets. And they should combine citizen journalist training, awareness-raising around specific issues, and digital communications to foster these alternative voices. This kind of initiative requires contributions from civil society organisations as well as the South African media and its academic institutions.*

- *To strengthen community radio, media development initiatives still need to focus on skills training. But community radio stations should be understood as businesses and new models of income generation need to be found. There is a role for the private sector here to share experiences and expertise.*

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