



**MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Address by Minister Jackson Mthembu
COMMUNITY MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP
Virtual Consultative Conference
13 August 2020**

Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Ms Thembi Siweya
Chairperson and Board members of the MDDA
CEO of the MDDA, Ms. Zuki Potye
Prof Guy Berger, UNESCO
Mr Shepi Mati, Rhodes University
Leadership of the community and small commercial media sector
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen
Good Morning

Chairperson, thank you for the introduction and welcoming remarks at this consultative workshop.

Colleagues, we meet during the month of August which is dedicated to the celebration of the formidable women in our country. Women's month also provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the monumental achievement of

the more than 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 to protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women.

These phenomenal women paved the way for the many struggles for the emancipation of women to follow. Today, we recommit our pledge to realising women's rights for a gender equal future society.

We take this time to express our sincerest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of South African radio broadcast veteran, Bob Mabena. We also extend the same to the families of community broadcast activists, government communicators and small commercial media activists who recently lost their lives to COVID-19 and other illnesses. Their selfless contribution to the South African media landscape will forever be imprinted in our hearts and minds.

Let me acknowledge, if they are in the audience the new MDDA board members as recommended by the National Assembly to the President for appointment.

As promised when I was appointed to this responsibility and at my first interaction with the sector, I stated that I will prioritise installing leadership stability at MDDA. As you all know by now, Parliament has completed the process of appointing the board members for the existing four vacancies and will be initiating the process for the upcoming two vacancies in October 2020.

I instructed the Board to prioritise the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and that was achieved, Ms Potye is now the MDDA CEO. There are other commitments and priority areas that needs to occupy our time, including engaging with policy and legislative related matters, funding for the community and small commercial print media, etc. and we must get the reports on those from the MDDA and the GCIS.

In your invitation to me, you indicated that this consultative conference is in your Annual Performance Plan (APP), I accepted the invitation but must state that, I don't want this workshop to be another talk shop. The MDDA has produced a number of very useful Research Reports in its earlier years, which led to some interventions and initiatives by the industry and Parliament.

Government has through the 4th and 5th Administrations met with the sector through a number of summits like, the Media Transformation Colloquium 2016 and others in subsequent years. There is also international precedence and ideas that are a reference point for the sustainability of the sector.

After my appointment, I met the sector in August 2019, in Cape Town. A number of recommendations came out of these conversations. We must not again be seen to be consulting without implementation of the action plans concluded in other consultations.

Of course, others may not be time bound like those relating to policy, lawmaking and those with huge budget implications. However, other recommendations are implementable and the MDDA, GCIS and other related state entities must tell us, how far is the implementation of those. How are we going to enhance the efforts of a District Development Model (DDM) as the grassroots platforms of communication?

Having said the above, I acknowledge that all our plans have been destructed by the worldwide pandemic - COVID-19, which negatively affected our work plan.

In 1994, South Africa emerged from apartheid with a highly monopolised media industry, characterised by very limited diversity of news or opinion, and the suppression of the voices of black people.

The new democratic South Africa recognised the urgent and critical need for transformation of the media environment based on the key principle of freedom of expression, a right enshrined in our new Constitution.

In addition, media diversity and the invaluable role of the media to ensure access to information were from the start, understood as cornerstones of our democracy.

Diversity was - and is still seen today - a way in which new voices, new media sources, new language choices, diverse and representative content in terms of class, race, gender and geographic spread can be incorporated in the media environment, providing wider access and wider choice of media.

The need for such diversity has increased in importance as, globally, media has become more concentrated, limiting access, expression of diverse views and opinions and choice of sources of news.

Despite its more than 20 years of existence and considerable growth, which need to be correctly reflected and recorded, the sector remains highly fragile – a fact that the pandemic has brought sharply into focus with slashing of advertising budgets and the severe undervaluing of community media's role.

Community and small commercial media are critical in the battle of ideas, giving meaning and effect to the freedom of expression and the celebration of media freedom.

Besides its many other benefits, community and small commercial media's overwhelmingly unique selling point is that it deals with issues not adequately addressed by mainstream commercial media. The strengths of the community and small commercial media are well documented.

The declaration of a national disaster in terms of the National Disaster Management Act of 2002 and the Lockdown have served to highlight the critical importance and vast potential of community and small commercial media, to most effectively convey messaging around COVID-19.

Messaging such as the washing of hands, physical distancing and the wearing of masks, have found concrete expression in the sector.

This is the media sector that is directly accessible to grassroots communities and importantly, publish or broadcast in the mix of languages spoken by the communities it serves. Important messages and messaging, as they would say, is therefore not lost in translation.

As government, we are fully aware that, despite the considerable progress that has been made in establishing a footprint of community and small commercial media projects across the country, there is still much more work to be done, if we are to realise our vision of a robust, people-centred, public participatory discourse that represent the diverse nature of our population and fully sustainable democracy.

Whilst government is currently supporting the sector, as best as we can on our own, we know we can do more in terms of identifying other role players that can support it. This includes lobbying the private sector for support as we have done since we have come into office.

Post 1994 government created constitutionally enshrined media freedom for all, an enabling legislative and policy environment, established a regulatory framework that supports media diversity, committed to financially supporting the objectives of media diversity and development, and established the mechanisms towards the achievement of those goals.

In 2014, the MDDA celebrated its ten years of its existence. It enlisted its achievements, challenges and recommendations ahead.

We are now working towards the twenty years of its existence, we must reflect, how much have we improved from 2014 and what are the new challenging areas. With the increased exposure to the digital economy, what creative, innovative and practical solutions have we explored to support, strengthen and deepen media diversity and development?

There are many reasons for the continued challenges and fragility of the sector – ranging from the urgent need for transformation of the advertising industry; to a general lack of understanding of the value of community and small commercial media; compliance by the sector to basic regulatory requirements; sustainability and continuity of leadership of the sector, governance and management; at times lack of professional business operational systems and therefore increased opportunity for corruption within the sector; the depressed economy and now COVID-19.

Other factors such as shortage of skills, lack of sound audience and readership figures, the fact that many community media projects serve communities that have limited consumer power and are not lucrative markets for private sector advertisers contribute to the chronic battle for survival.

There should be no blame game and finger pointing, as we engage on mapping a sustainable future for the sector. The sector must also admit that it is also partly to blame in some instance with cases, as I indicated above, of poor governance and compliance with regulations, poor administration and lack of professionalism tarnishing the reputation of the sector as a whole.

As we approach 20 years since the promulgation of the MDDA Act, the government is still committed to supporting the sector, as a vehicle for nation

building and public participation, and, as a sector that is crucial to the enhancement of democracy of our country.

Government established the MDDA in 2002, because of the need for supporting a vibrant community and small commercial media sector in the country, to safe guard our democracy and we fully recognise that the need is as great today, as it was then.

We are therefore delighted to have the opportunity at this consultative conference to consult the sector, government and all role players on strategies we must put in place to ensure sustainability of the sector over time.

The end result of the conference will be Terms of Reference for wide-ranging research that will inform the building of a sustainable model for the sector, the review and strengthening of the draft Discussion Paper on Media Transformation arising from the previous consultations, taking into account the digital economic opportunities, the current and post COVID-19 economic recovery plan and the new normal that has become a part of our lives.

We would like to assure both the MDDA, the community and small commercial media sector that government's commitment to supporting this critical research as we together work towards safeguarding the long-term future of our community media and the concrete legislative proposal that must be practical, fundable and implementable.

Our sustainability research project must also find ways and means through which community structures can have ownership and be party to the funding of the sector.

As we review the 20 years of the MDDA, we must have regard to the Integrated ICT White Paper recommendations, the draft Discussion Paper on

Media Transformation, the 2019 Summit Action Plan and any other related concrete actions to be presented for consideration.

Any dialogue, that is repetitive of the issues previously raised, will be fruitless and a waste of an opportunity to shape the future.

Government established the MDDA, to ensure there is a conducive environment for media development and diversity. Government is therefore calling on MDDA to review its effectiveness, efficiencies, with regard to the policy reality to reconfigure and ensure growth of media diversity, ensure the creation of platforms for the voices of all South Africans to be expressed, heard and mainstreamed as part of the National Development Plan, revised Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the economic recovery plan during and post COVID-19.

I am confident that a report from this consultative conference will produce an action plan that is implementable. We also accept that you seek to achieve Terms of Reference for the Sustainability Research which we fully support.

We are confident that a sustainable, resilient and forward looking community and small commercial media sector will emerge from this sustainable research project, which will make effective use of the digital future.

I wish you a successful dialogue.

I thank you.