

Letter from the editor



Kara van der Merwe
Editor-in-Chief

When I was younger, words used to float in the air. They just didn't make sense to me. In grade three I started wearing big glasses with purple lenses to try and contain these words so that they don't fly away too far. It felt very embarrassing as a child when I was trying to express myself or trying to interpret words on paper. Reading, writing and articulating words used to be my biggest fear. Looking back at these obstacles, it's a tortured kind of beauty to try and take those

scattered words and string them together sensibly to create something magical with a real impact.

My home town is equally as magical. I think of it as more of a village. It's cosy and familiar. Everyone knows and takes care of one another. It's my safe space.

Greyton is a small town in the Overberg, a 45 minute drive from Hermanus. Some of the most interesting people I've ever met live in Greyton. I don't think it can be confined to a specific cliché. It's not just a small passer-by town. It's not

the hustling, buzzing Stellenbosch. It's just a community of people that came together and stuck together.

It's difficult to explain what it's like to grow up in a small village to people who grew up in cities. My morning traffic consists of cows and horses crossing the road.

The local barista at my favourite coffee shop knows everyone and when I've been away too long, she calls me to ask when I'll be taking my coffee with normal milk and sugar again.

My home town does not

have a community newspaper. Greyton relies on surrounding community publications, national media, as well as social media for news. My town is romanticised in this media, but the local issues are left untouched.

Community publications are how we give voices and a platform to those who would otherwise be left unheard.

With this newspaper, we hope to show you that words are the roots of change and community journalism is the lifeblood that keeps social justice alive.



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“In most of Africa publishers tried to go digital, and it backfired.”

Community newspapers have seen a drop in circulation and print runs, according to Dr Kate Skinner, executive director of the Association of Independent Publishers.
PHOTO: Jodi-Mari Adams

Print publications: Closures, community and circulation

Jodi-Mari Adams

The Covid-19 pandemic drastically impacted the already declining community newspaper print runs and circulation rates, according to Kate Skinner, executive director of the Association of Independent Publishers.

This decline can be linked to the daily economic hardships faced by small towns and rural areas in South Africa, said Skinner. While “things have started to pick up post-Covid”, they are not back to pre-Covid levels”, she added.

Despite these challenges, ensuring the sustainability of community publications is vital, said Skinner. These publications help build communities from the ground up, she said.

“They offer a local perspective, [and] are critical for democracy [as] they hold local business and municipalities [accountable],” she said.

COVID CHALLENGES

Paarl Coldset, a print production company

based in Paarden Eiland, observed a decline of 3% in the number of community newspapers they printed post-pandemic, stated Eugene Ramnarayan, operations manager at Paarl Coldset.

In July 2020, Media24 announced in a statement that the pandemic forced several community newspapers into closure due to a lack of economic viability.

Many of the publications that survived went through a restructuring process and had to merge with other local publications or transitioned onto digital platforms, Media24 stated at the time.

Before Covid, *Loxion News*, a township publication based in Vereeniging, Gauteng, was doing well, according to Fanelo Maseko, the publication's owner and editor.

However, they have now

stopped printing and switched to broadcasting on YouTube.

“We thought, okay, because there is news and we have readers [...] let's go to YouTube, and produce news with video format, and just share it for our readers,” said Maseko.

IN COMPETITION

“Google and Facebook take the lion's share of [online] advertising. [...] The only way to make money is to have a lot of web traffic,” said Skinner. Small publications see lower web traffic because their audiences are smaller than their commercial competitors, she added.

Community publications are also known to face challenges transitioning into a digital market, said Skinner.

Currently, advertising pamphlets are the

main source of revenue for many newspaper publishers, said Ramnarayan.

LACK OF SUPPORT

Community newspapers are a good vehicle for advertisers to tap into local markets, said Angelo Julies, editor of *Eikestadnuus*, a Stellenbosch-based publication.

Government organisations, such as the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), have been unsupportive of community newspapers and have “funded

very few print and online projects”, said Skinner. “[The MDDA] have focused more on community radio than on community print,” added Skinner.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

“In most of Africa publishers tried to go digital, and it backfired,” said Ramnarayan. Due to Africa's digital divide, data inaccessibility has led to many publications returning to printed newspapers, added Ramnarayan.

Residents in townships and underprivileged communities may not have access to the internet or smartphones, explained Julies.

It could take up to 10 years before more affordable provisions for data or fibre are made accessible to all of South Africa, making the shift to digital a difficult goal for the immediate future, said Ramnarayan.

“In my opinion, [community newspapers are] a very important vehicle [and] a very important tool,” said Julies. Society will always have a place for these publications, he said.



The next 5 years still look promising for print production, according to Eugene Ramnarayan, operations manager at Paarl Coldset, a print production company based in Paarden Eiland.
PHOTO: Jodi-Mari Adams

Forging local connections

Emma Solomon, Kara van der Merwe & Talia Kincaid

Community news reporting is about more than simply serving the community with facts, said Wayne van der Walt, editor of *Highvelder News*, a print and online publication owned by Caxton Local Media.

Highvelder News has remained an integral part of its community for over a century and currently distributes 12 000 copies weekly, said Van der Walt. This was made possible by establishing local connections, he added.

“You have to be a people person to be a community journalist,” said Blake Linder, editor of the *Knysna-Plett Herald*. Van der Walt shared similar views by expressing that local journalists are essentially an “extension of the community that they serve, because [they] also form part of the community”.

Community journalism

remains crucial because it taps into the complexities layered within local experiences, said Hannelie Booyens, former journalist at *Verwoerdburg Nuus*, a community news publication that was based in Centurion.

Highvelder News' journalists became particularly invested in the journey of Teagan van Wyk, a young cancer patient, as he battled his way through the disease, explained Van der Walt.

The team closely followed Van Wyk's journey over four years, said Van der Walt. “You become a part of these stories,” he said, explaining that after being so invested in Van Wyk's journey, the *Highvelder News* team was devastated upon learning of his passing.

“We weren't just writing about [Van Wyk], we were also going through all the emotions,” said Van der Walt.

PUTTING HUMANITY FIRST

Becoming invested is not an irregular occurrence, said Van der Walt.

“There are numerous instances where we as journalists and editors have shared in the community's grief over its losses,” he added. “The way I like to see it is I can write about you, and berate you, but I still have to face you the next day in [our local] Spar because we're part of the same community,” said Linder.

Community publications always consider the personal relationships that they have within the community, added Linder.

“We shouldn't just hold up a mirror. We should also hold up a lens through which other perspectives, possibilities and realities [can] come into focus,” said Booyens.



GRAPHIC: Jess Holing

Print's misfortunes



Community publications are responsible for keeping the community up to date on any issues that might directly affect them, according to Roelin D'Amico, the KwaZulu-Natal board director of the Forum of Community Journalists. PHOTO: Jodi-Mari Adams

Michelle Grobbelaar

While demand for national newspapers might have declined over the last decade, community newspapers remain sought after. This is according to Roelin D'Amico, the KwaZulu-Natal board director of the Forum of Community Journalists (FCJ). The demand for community newspapers is linked to the ability of these publications to serve as a voice for the communities in which they are based, said Dave Savides, editor-in-chief of *Zululand Observer*. "[Community publications] are the only [link] between the residents and council, which means that we can assist with service delivery issues and keeping the community up to date on any issues that might affect them directly," said D'Amico.

PRINT LIVES ON
Despite the popularity of digital

media affecting the demand for community journalism, Caxton Local Media, a multi-media publishing company, believes that "print is not dead," said D'Amico.

"As long as there are local papers to report on issues that affect the community, the paper industry will continue to thrive," stated D'Amico. "People still like to read the paper and keep it for records if their children or families are showcased in them," said Sipho Siso, the editor of *Alex News*, which is owned by Caxton Local Media. *Alex News* is distributed to houses, taxi ranks, police stations and schools in Alexandra, Johannesburg and is also available online, according to Siso.

FREE NEWSPAPERS
About 158 newspapers nationally

still use the so-called knock-and-drop distribution method, according to a recent report by the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

This method refers to the free distribution of community newspapers to local residents, said Marietta Lombard, the editor-in-chief at Caxton Local Media, and the executive director of FCJ.

Alex News' so-called knock-and-drop distribution average decreased from an average of 19 737 copies to 14 790 fortnightly copies from 2019 to 2022, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations South Africa.

The team at *Alex News* ensures that the newspapers are delivered on time by having an in-house distribution service, which utilises company trucks, and runners who hand-deliver papers, said Siso.

The advertisement squeeze

Jan-Hendrik de Villiers

Retrenchments, a lack of revenue, and the aftereffects of Covid-19 have left community newspapers in financially precarious positions, according to Dave Savides, the editor-in-chief of *Zululand Observer*, a community publication owned by Caxton Local Media.

Part of the reason for this is because "community newspapers are primarily reliant on funding from advertisers," said Ben Burger, deputy executive director of the Forum of Community Journalists (FCJ) Western Cape division.

However, there are two alternative financial models, said Burger. "The first one is what we call a 'free community newspaper', like *Eikestadnuus* in Stellenbosch. There are also other community newspapers that you have to pay for, like *Worcester Standard*," said Burger.

Free community newspapers make money through advertisements, while newspapers that have a cover price, also make an income through sales alongside advertising, explained Burger.

RECOVERY MODE

Community newspapers are still reeling from the financial challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, said Savides. But for *Zululand Observer*, "business has done really well over the past 18 months and while we are not yet up to pre-Covid

incomes, the signs of full recovery are there," said Savides.

Apart from its main office in Empangeni, *Zululand Observer* has a branch that is operated by one reporter based in eShowe, covering central Zululand, said Savides. There is also a branch in Mtubatuba, where another reporter covers Northern Zululand, added Savides.

During Covid-19, *Zululand Observer* made a strategic decision to move the Richards Bay branch online and transferred "staff to Empangeni or had them working from home other than on deadline days," said Savides.

Their staff also faced "voluntary retrenchments," said Savides, who added that the publication is still reeling from the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. "We reduced staff from 61 to 49," stated Savides.

BALANCE

The *Zoutpansberger*, an Afrikaans and English print and digital publication based in Limpopo, has an alternative revenue stream through its cover price, according to Anton van Zyl, the owner and manager of the *Zoutpansberger*. However, it still relies heavily on advertising, which makes up 90% of its revenue, added Van Zyl.

CORPORATE ADVANTAGE

Income from advertising helps to fund business expenses and overhead costs of community newspapers, said Roelin D'Amico, the KwaZulu-Natal board director of the FCJ, to Michelle Grobbelaar of *SMF Newspaper*.

One of these examples include the overhead costs of community newspapers that are distributed for free to residents of designated delivery areas, according to D'Amico.



Income from advertising helps to fund business expenses and overhead costs of community newspapers.

Student protest: 'No other means of being heard'

Amy Cloete & Daniel Roodt

A lack of space and time leaves community publications unable to effectively cover student movements, according to Vusi Mthlane, a reporter at *South Coast Sun*, a print and online publication, owned by Caxton Local Media, based in KwaZulu-Natal.

NATURE OF THE PROTESTS

Community publications also tend to focus on protests where property damage occurs, said Mthlane. This is because public property "belongs to the readers, so it is [the paper's] duty to inform them about that," added Mthlane.

"When the protests are more violent, the focus tends to shift to covering that, rather than reasons behind the protests, which become secondary," stated Mthlane.

LACK OF HUMANITY

However, when national publications take on student protest coverage,

there is a tendency for students to be "looked at as statistics," said Lerato Pae, former student representative councillor at Rhodes University.

When students protest, people "tend to forget that there are very serious and valid issues" being voiced, added Pae. "[Students] don't have any other means of being heard."

THE SOLUTION

"Community publications should meet students on the ground to fully understand their issues, to get to hear why they are protesting," said Sifiso Zungu, South African Students Congress (SASCO) Western Cape chair.



"The reality is that when people protest, they don't have any other means of being heard," said Lerato Pae, former student representative councillor at Rhodes University. PHOTO: Jess Holing

Student-run publications: Journalists of the future

Daniel Roodt

Student newspapers are critical in preparing young journalists for the working world and keeping the communities in which they operate well-informed. This is according to Andre Gouws, lecturer at the department of languages and cultural sciences at Akademia, and founding lecturer of the student-run publications *SMF News* (previously *MattieMedia*) and *threestreamsmedia*.

Both are online publications run by students and are overseen by lecturers from the department of journalism at Stellenbosch University (SU) and North-West University (NWU) respectively, stated Gouws.

INDUSTRY SKILLS

Students get a "real feeling for what the world [of a journalist] is like," explained Gouws. Student-run publications allow students to run their own newsrooms and write content that is published, as a form of "authentic learning," he said.

Working for these publications teaches students valuable skills, stated Gouws.

"[Student news] crafts the skill of seeing the angle and seeing the approach that you can take to deliver something that people want to read, see, or hear," explained Colin Nass, managing editor of *Cue*, a student-operated publication that is run during

the National Arts Festival in Makhanda. *Cue* makes use of journalism and media studies students at Rhodes University on a voluntary basis, said Nass.

Cue used to be a print newspaper, stated Nass. In 2022, however, it was distributed digitally in an attempt to "move into the 21st century," explained Nass. "Student news is the only thing that equipped me to source information, contact people, conduct interviews and navigate

trauma," said Janet Heard, managing editor at *Daily Maverick*. Heard wrote for *Rhodes*, an independent student-run publication, when she was attending Rhodes University. "It gave me the groundwork needed to be a reporter," added Heard.

INDUSTRY PREPARATION

New journalists need to adapt quickly to the pressures and demands of a newsroom, so the time spent working in a student-run newsroom is invaluable, said Heard.

"People who have been in student press hit the ground running [when they join a newsroom]," stated Heard. "It helps you not to be a rabbit in the headlights."

This is invaluable as "newsrooms don't have time to hold your hand," said Heard.

SERVING LOCALS

"Community news is struggling," stated Gouws. Beyond training future journalists, student-run publications also serve a vital role for the communities they operate in, by covering important stories relevant to the community, he said.

An example of this is when *threestreamsmedia* embarked on a project to map the potholes in Potchefstroom, to warn



"I think that that freedom [*Cue* provides] definitely allows journalism students to develop their skills and understand problems they might encounter engaging with sources," stated Colin Nass, managing editor of *Cue*. PHOTO: Daniel Roodt



"A lot of students afterwards said this [*Cue*] was incredibly difficult, but I feel like I could step into any job I need to right now," said Colin Nass, managing editor of *Cue*. PHOTO: Daniel Roodt

motorists in the city, said Gouws. This was something that "really got the town talking but no other media followed it up," added Gouws.

Financial difficulties are causing publications to downsize their newsrooms, which leads to gaps in the publication of important community news, according to Gouws.

Student-run publications that don't have to worry about advertising and have large newsrooms, can fill this void, explained Gouws.

"*SMF News* is a sister publication of *SMF Newspaper* and is also published by the BAHons (Journalism) class of 2023."

Playing a part in history

Thameenah Daniels



"[Community newspapers] address issues and news that affected people directly in their immediate environment," said Prof Albert Grundlingh, retired history lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch. PHOTO: Joseph Bracken

Research has shown that internationally, community newspapers have played the role of the informed messengers for the people, especially during eras where knowledge was not as accessible as it is today, said Prof Lizette Rabe, former chair of the department of journalism at Stellenbosch University (SU), and author of *A Luta Continua*, a book on the history of media freedom in South Africa.

"Without information, on a very basic and local level, citizens cannot play the role they should in local governments," stated Rabe. "One might argue that in an emerging democracy, community papers, radio stations [and] news websites play an even bigger role," said Rabe.

INFORMED MESSENGERS

The impact of community newspapers in aiding the anti-apartheid struggle cannot be understated, said Monty Roodt, anti-apartheid activist and former journalist for the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Tribune*.

"[Community newspapers] tried to create a voice against the apartheid government, and showcase the voice of black people," added Roodt. It was through the power of their words that community newspapers were crucial in covering grassroots political activities during apartheid, he added.

CREATING CHANGE

"[Community newspapers] provided information on the nuts and bolts of local societies and often contained what today can be regarded as 'hidden histories' in some form or the other," said Prof Albert Grundlingh, retired history lecturer at SU.

During apartheid, publications like *The Herald* and *Vrye Weekblad* informed their communities about current events, including protests, non-governmental organisation's activities, and other important issues, stated Roodt.

The Afrikaans and English press played different roles during apartheid, said Grundlingh. The Afrikaans press often attempted to justify apartheid

whereas the English press were generally more critical of it, he added.

Pro-apartheid community newspapers were also used to push the agendas of the former National Party (NP), said Roodt. *The Citizen* was funded by the NP to portray their point of view, according to Roodt.

"Ultimately it revolved around power and who should rule the country," said Grundlingh.

THE WAY FORWARD

"A community newspaper is the poor man's advocate," said Lise Beyers, editor of *Paarl Post*.

"Community newspapers have a responsibility to inform communities of their rights with regards to basic service delivery in their area, and to be their voice to ensure those services really deliver," said Rabe. An informed community is an empowered community, added Rabe.

Serving as watchdogs for local governments is a challenge that community newspapers face when tasked with reporting the stories that usually go unheard, stated Beyers.

It is important that community newspapers continue to hold municipalities accountable, while promoting the management of schools, education, and job creation within communities, said Roodt.



Community newspapers have a responsibility to inform communities of their rights [...] and to be their voice to ensure those services really deliver.

WhatsApp: News central or news crisis?



When people spread misinformation on WhatsApp during times of crisis, it is mainly out of concern to protect their loved ones, explained Cayley Clifford, deputy editor of Africa Check. PHOTO: Mia van der Merwe

Mia van der Merwe

Over 23 million South Africans are WhatsApp users, according to statistics by Tyntec, a German-based signal delivery platform. With this many users, it is important that the correct media literacy is being taught, said Cayley Clifford, deputy editor at Africa Check, a non-profit organisation that focuses on independent fact-checking.

"The impact of half-truths, hoaxes and misleading information can be life-threatening, ranging from the misapplication of funds and poor policymaking, to misdiagnosis and even violence and death," stated Stefan de Villiers, editor of *Lowveld Media*, a division of Caxton Local Media, which publishes nine publications in the Mpumalanga area.

The spread of fake news and misinformation on WhatsApp can have a dire impact on the credibility of a community newspaper, according to Fred Felton, publisher and editor of *Umhlanga Life*, a community magazine in

the Durban area, Umhlanga.

This is because "many journalists will join WhatsApp groups to look out for breaking news stories," said Felton.

POTENTIAL HARM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The community of Hilton in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) mainly relies on WhatsApp for area-specific news, according to Deidre Rautenbach, community member and admin of the community support group, Hilton Buddies. Misinformation is often shared unintentionally, according to Clifford, who added that emotive language helps spread misinformation as it makes it more believable.

"During the riots in KZN, people were emotionally charged and were quick to spread [fake] news that they thought was relevant to the situation," said Rautenbach. It is vital to have a group admin that will fact-check information posted to groups, added Rautenbach.

HANDLING PITFALLS

"As a general rule in our newsroom, we do not regard WhatsApp as a trusted vessel of news," said Yaseen Gaffar, journalist for *District Mail & Herald*, a newspaper that is distributed along Sir Lowry's Pass from Elgin to Somerset West.

"We [try to] avoid accepting any unverified source on WhatsApp," said Gaffar.

Media publications must follow strict social media policies and "examine and scrutinise everything to filter out the fake news [from WhatsApp]," before disseminating the information, said Felton.

Lowveld Media's motto is "rather be right than first," stated De Villiers.

DANGERS TO JOURNALISM

News spread on WhatsApp is inevitable and difficult to combat because, "it is wholly unregulated and the information disseminated is totally untested," said Max du

Preez, founder and current editor of *Vrye Weekblad*, a progressive Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper founded in 1988.

"Part of WhatsApp's success [at spreading misinformation] is that many people feel an intimacy. They feel they have a source of information that is free of big media manipulation or state control," added Du Preez.

"Misinformation is often shared unintentionally."

'WHAT'S CRAP ON WHATSAPP?'

'What's Crap on WhatsApp?', a bi-weekly podcast exclusive to WhatsApp, was created for the purpose of debunking misinfor-

mation, according to Clifford. The podcast was launched in 2019 by Africa Check in partnership with Volume, a podcasting company with over 20 international and local podcasts, she added.

The hosts send out a voice note in which they debunk the worst misinformation forwarded to them by the podcast subscribers, said Clifford.

SEEING SHOULD NOT BE BELIEVING

Social media platforms have made it easier for misinformation to reach people quickly, said De Villiers.

"Two men in Qatar ingested alcohol-based hand sanitiser and surface disinfectant, thinking it would protect them from the Covid-19 virus due to misinformation that was spread," said Clifford.

Until information can be proven to be true, it "must be treated as inaccurate," said De Villiers.



GRAPHIC: Mia van der Merwe
SOURCE: Africa Check

"Part of WhatsApp's success is that many people feel an intimacy. They feel they have a source of information that is free of big media manipulation or state control."



In a study conducted by Africa Check in 2020, it was reported that only 5% of African WhatsApp users reported suspected disinformation to reliable fact-checking organisations.

Many fake messages attempt to incite fear or anger. These messages can include shocking claims about crime, kidnapping, xenophobia or racism.

Messages that have the double arrow icon, mean that they have been forwarded more than 5 times. Even if a message has been shared many times, it does not make it true, according to Africa Check's website.

Fake or fact, the pitfalls of Facebook news

Emma Solomon

The persistence of disinformation and fake news on Facebook threatens the integrity of community publications, said Cayley Clifford, the deputy editor of Africa Check, a non-profit organisation. Africa Check has also done independent fact-checking with Facebook's parent company, Meta.

However, Facebook does contribute to community journalism as it can be used as a source of information, said Blake Linder, news editor of *The Knysna-Plett Herald*, a weekly community newspaper, owned by Caxton Local Media. But, information from Facebook must be treated with caution, he added.

FACT-CHECK FACEBOOK

"So many people are using social

media as a source of news and I do not think that is an inherently bad thing – as long as you are aware that not everything you are seeing is true," said Clifford.

Facebook has "various tools and algorithms to detect the likelihood of something being fake," said Clifford. But fake news shared on private community groups cannot be fact-checked, Clifford added.

An organization like Africa Check will publish a report on detected fake information "and Facebook will demote that post in people's news feeds," she explained.

"[The false information] will stay on the platform with a label to say that it has been fact-checked by a fact-checking organization and they found it to be false," said Clifford.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Under the Disaster Management Act, the distribution of fake news about Covid-19 and the government's reaction to it was considered a criminal offense, said Emma Sadler, media lawyer and founder of The Digital Law Company.

Sharing "fake news can really fall into just about any different category of legal implication of publication," stated Sadler.

Individuals can be prosecuted for these legal implications, which include "privacy infringement, defamation, hate speech [or] sharing fake news which leads to incitement of harm or violence to a person or damage to property," said Sadler.

Whether you share fake news or disinformation unconsciously or

intentionally, "the same applies," explained Sadler.

"We live in a post-truth era and I think it falls on every individual user to stop [the spread of fake news]," said Sadler. Before one presses the share button "presume everything you receive is nonsense until you can go and prove that it is true," she added.

IDENTIFYING DISINFORMATION

Understanding what a credible source is and checking "if mainstream news providers are carrying the same story", help identify disinformation, stated Sadler.

"Often disinformation is designed to play on our emotions, and you are, [therefore], much

more likely to forward it on," Clifford stated.

Even when news is posted on Facebook by a person you know or someone who has previously provided valuable and trustworthy information, it is imperative to fact-check it, according to Linder.

COMPETING FOR VIEWS

Community news publications often find themselves in competition with social media platforms such as Facebook, stated Linder.

"You're never going to be first [to publish a story] compared to Facebook, especially as a weekly newspaper," said Linder. But, community news has the opportunity to "tell the story in its entirety [...] more often than not, what you get on Facebook is only a portion of the story," added Linder.

FAST FACTS:

Fake-news and disinformation are "terms [that can be] used interchangeably," said Cayley Clifford, deputy editor of Africa Check.

Fake-news can refer to any false information, or fake and manipulated content," said Clifford. This includes disinformation, said Clifford.

Disinformation can be defined as "false information that is spread with the intention to deceive", whereas misinformation is "spread by people who do not necessarily know what they are sharing is false", added Clifford.



Facebook "is a great way for us to reach the community," stated Blake Linder, news editor of *The Knysna-Plett Herald*. However, the trustworthiness of the platform "is a bit of a grey area so we do treat it with a lot of caution," said Linder. PHOTO: Emma Solomon

The digital conundrum

Liam Voorma

With the rapid rise of online news consumption, changing consumer preferences and declining circulation, the print industry is struggling to adapt and remain financially viable. This is according to Angelo Julies, editor at *Eikestadmus*, a Media24-owned community newspaper based in Stellenbosch.

"The rise of free online news sources, social media platforms, and citizen journalism has intensified competition for traditional print newspapers," stated Julies.

THE ONLINE SHIFT

In order to compete with digital media, print publications are pressured to adopt a multimedia approach to capitalise on rising trends, according to Nicole Rimbault, operations director of the *Knysna-Plett Herald*.

The *Knysna-Plett Herald*, owned by Caxton Local Media, has been in publication since

1984 and shifted their print publication online in 2010 following a shift in the behavioural patterns of their readers and consumers, said Rimbault. Roughly 60% of their readership is now online, she said.

"Even if your print product is doing well, you still need to branch out because your audience wants so much more, such as videos, audio and podcasts," said Chantel Erfort, editor-in-chief at Africa Community Media (ACM).

BENEFITS OF ONLINE

The internet and social media allow online publications to have a wider reach compared to print publications, according to Julies. For instance, *Eikestadmus* is available on the Network24 online platform, which makes it available to a national audience, added Julies.

Features such as comments, social media sharing, and

multimedia content allow for online publications to have a more interactive experience for readers which results in a greater reach, said Julies.

"Online publications are also more cost effective than print publications because it requires lower production and distribution costs compared to print newspapers," according to Julies.

Online news also has the benefit of timeliness, said Julies. "Online publications can be

updated in real-time, allowing for immediate news coverage," he added.

THE POWER OF PRINT

However, newspapers offer a certain sense of credibility, according to Erfort.

"With online news you're able to edit and republish. You do not have that luxury with print. You have to get it right the first time," said Erfort.

Currently, ACM has a higher print readership than online due to their distribution model, said Erfort. ACM has close to 13 community titles, an online platform and distributes 694 000 printed copies weekly within the Western Cape area, according to Erfort.

Whilst ACM was unable to provide exact numbers, they are currently working on expanding their online readership, she added.



"With online news you're able to edit and republish. You do not have that luxury with print, you have to get it right the first time."

Keeping local governments accountable

Kara van der Merwe

Community news reporting is neglected by the South African media industry, which tends to favour metropolitan areas. This is according to Max du Preez, founder and editor of *Vrye Weekblad*.

The deterioration of governance and service delivery are first and foremost acutely felt by citizens on a local level, said Du Preez.

Communities are underrepresented and underreported within mainstream media, said Dr Dinesh Balliah, director at Witwatersrand University's centre for journalism. "The gaps in servicing public opinion [...] are supposed to be filled in by community newspapers and radio stations," said Du Preez.

"It is impossible to overstate the importance of community newspapers," said Wayne van der Walt, editor of *Highveld News*, a community newspaper based in Ermelo, Mpumalanga. It distributes 12 000 free newspapers weekly, according to Van der Walt.

HOLDING PEOPLE IN POWER ACCOUNTABLE

"Community media have the potential to keep local governments and individual city and town councils accountable in a way that mainstream media can't," said Du Preez.

"Community newspapers have shown that this segment of the

media can be first in picking up local corruption, dereliction of duty and abuse of power," explained Du Preez.

South Africa's democracy is built on a free and autonomous press, said Van der Walt.

This is why community publications are important to ensure that the populace is informed about the actions of the people they elect, stated Van der Walt.

"Without the media highlighting these issues, we aren't able to move forward in terms of our democracy," said Balliah.

This highlights the importance of community journalism, not just on a political level, but in terms of the cultural and social aspects of communities, she said.

EDITORIAL ISSUES

However, a community newspaper is only as good as the foundation that editors and mentors have "laid down over decades", stated Van der Walt.

There is a lack of hard community news across the board, said Balliah. There is not a large enough focus on community crime statistics and investigations at a local municipal level, she stated.

"With a few notable exceptions, most community media are more interested in pandering to advertisers, especially local businesses, than in informing citizens of the real issues," said Du Preez.

FUNDING PROBLEMS

The local media that are not owned

by media conglomerates are often unable to secure funding to invest in high quality reporters and often rely on handouts, said Du Preez. This contributes significantly to the challenges faced by many local community members in that too many local newspapers are owned by national media companies with a strict mandate to only make a profit, added Du Preez.

A further challenge posed to community publications is the hiking of print prices, according to Dr Kate Skinner, executive director of The Association for Independent Publishers (AIP). "[This] makes it extremely difficult for publications to survive," she said.

AIP is a national organisation that currently has 226 registered

publications, said Skinner. It focusses on advancing the interests of South Africa's local grassroots independent print media sector, said Skinner.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

"Since [*Highveld News*] has been in print for more than a century, it is crucial to remember that, in order to gain and maintain the trust of the community, being a community newspaper entails more than simply serving that community's needs. Instead you are a part of the community you serve," said Van der Walt.

The purpose of community media is not to have huge audiences, but to focus on local audiences and build that commitment to report the truth, said Skinner.

"Broadcasting, print and online [media] tend to focus on the big stories, political and otherwise. The smaller cities and township issues don't get much media attention," said Du Preez. Although community media are obligated to "expose the different communities and their lifestyles, cultures and problems in their region to each other", there is not much of that being done, added Du Preez.



PHOTOS: Supplied GRAPHIC: Jess Holing

Max du Preez, founder and current editor of *Vrye Weekblad*.

Dr Dinesh Balliah, director at Witwatersrand University's centre for journalism.

Wayne van der Walt, editor of *Highveld News*, Mpumalanga.

Dr Kate Skinner, executive director of The Association for Independent Publishers (AIP).

Beyond 'surface-level' reporting

Liza-May Pieters



"Investigative journalism is important for public accountability, consumer protection and guard railing global governance," said Prof Thuli Madonsela, the law trust chair in social justice at Stellenbosch University's centre for social justice, and the former public protector of South Africa.

PHOTO: Liza-May Pieters

An increase in investigative journalism on a community level means "more eyes on hidden wrongdoings", according to Prof Thuli Madonsela, the law trust chair in social justice at Stellenbosch University's (SU) centre for social justice, and the former public protector of South Africa. "As public protector, we relied enormously on information from investigative journalism, which we used as guides on what evidence to dig for

through subpoenas and related forensic means," said Madonsela.

Investigations on a local level help communities "overcome hurdles such as institutional capture and bribery, where there is monopoly over accountability authority," stated Madonsela.

VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Stories that affect vulnerable communities, like the ones

that *GroundUp* covers, are too important to sit behind a paywall, said Colleen Monaghan, development and operations manager at the online news platform, *GroundUp*. This is why *GroundUp* has a "creative commons licence", which means that other publications can republish *GroundUp* articles for free as long as they are credited, explained Monaghan.

Community level investigations means "more accountability from people in govern-

ment, especially on the local ward councillor level", said Monaghan.

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

"We have never really been in a position to blow the lid off what is really going on," stated Rod Amner, education editor at *Grocott's Mail*, a publication run by Rhodes University journalism students and staff members, based in Makhanda, Eastern

Cape. Their lack of in-depth investigations is largely due to financial reasons and a shortage of employees as the "economy in the town is very small, especially after Covid", said Amner.

THABO BESTER

The case of Thabo Bester, a convicted rapist and murderer, is one instance of how investigations done by local journalists had a direct impact on the community, said Monaghan.

This case would have remained a "secret of the criminal syndicate behind it, while society had a false sense of security [by believing] that he died in a suicidal fire in May 2022", said Madonsela.

Local journalists at *GroundUp* broke the story of Bester's escape after receiving a tip-off and they pursued the story from there, said Monaghan.

The "large grants from institutional funders" given to journalists at *GroundUp*, allow them to devote more time to investigating stories, explained Monaghan. This means that there is less pressure on journalists to just do "surface level stories", to meet commercial demands, she added.

Funding intimidation halts journalistic investigations

Daniel Roodt & Liza-May Pieters

Intimidation and a lack of funding has left community news publications unable to conduct thorough investigative journalism.

This is according to Rod Amner, education editor at *Grocott's Mail*, an online community publication based in Makhanda, Eastern Cape. The publication has a monthly online viewership of 23 000 people, according to Amner.

In-depth investigations at a community level are important as "it ensures that people in power keep their promises", stated Saai Mahlangu, a news reporter at *Mpumalanga Press*, a free print and digital publication. *Mpumalanga Press* produces between 6 000 and 15 000 copies monthly, according to the publication.

NO MONEY

Many community publica-

tions do not have the capacity to run long investigations due to a lack of advertising revenue, according to Amner.

Grocott's Mail is currently run by less than 10 inexperienced post-graduate students and two to three lecturers from the school of journalism and media studies at Rhodes University, said Amner. Conversely, *Grocott's Mail* employed 50 people in 2004 when the university took over the publication for the purposes of training journalism students, according to Amner.

This problem is not unique to *Grocott's Mail*.

"There's not enough resources to do proper investigations, as most newspapers struggle to access funding," said Nkosiyo Max Mxabo, owner and publisher of *Pondo News*.

Pondo News is a weekly isiXhosa publication produced in Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal, with a circulation of 10 000 readers, stated Mxabo. The publication employs three full-time journalists and four freelancers, and are able to conduct a few investigations per year, according to Mxabo.

"We don't have forensic abilities," said Amner. "We're overworked and there is too much to

do, meaning there is no way we can do it properly."

INTIMIDATION & THREATS

Local reporters occasionally face backlash from people in the community they try to investigate, said Mxabo. "At times, [journalists] do get intimidation from individuals, especially politicians or senior government officials."

There have also been anecdotal stories of politicians withholding advertising from newspapers in response to negative coverage, stated Mxabo. This only further hinders publications' abilities to conduct thorough investigations, as many are struggling to stay afloat, according to Mxabo.

CREATING CHANGE

Despite funding challenges, some community publications have been able to conduct meaningful investigative journalism. The *Knysna-Plett Herald*, a print and online publication, exposed one of the municipal managers for committing irregular expenditure, according to Chris du Plessis, former editor of the *Knysna-Plett Herald*.

The publication has "repeatedly exposed municipal officials for irregular expenditure, in some cases involving tens of millions of rand. Several of them have since vacated their posts," said Du Plessis.



"The idea that a rag-tag group made up of some lecturers and students can conduct thorough investigations is pie in the sky," said Rod Amner (pictured above), education editor of *Grocott's Mail*, a publication run by the school of journalism and media studies at Rhodes University. PHOTO: Daniel Roodt

“We’re overworked and there is too much to do.”

“Grocott’s is not part of a bigger company that could absorb losses,” said Rod Amner, education editor of Grocott’s Mail, a publication run by the Rhodes University, school of journalism and media studies. Pictured is the old Grocott’s Mail building, where the publication used to operate out of.
PHOTO: Daniel Roodt

The power of hyperlocal grassroots reporting

Tapiwanashe Zaranyika



"The youth is very curious about sports, crime-related stories, school stories and other important events in the community. *False Bay Echo* has found a way to provide the youth with the important information online and in print," said Bobby Jordan, senior reporter at the *Sunday Times*. PHOTO: Tapiwanashe Zaranyika

The value of hyperlocal journalism lies within its ability to cover national news in a local context, said Chantel Erfort, editor-in-chief of *Africa Community Media*, the publisher of *False Bay Echo*. *False Bay Echo* distributes 31 590 newspapers to 20 communities within the Southern Peninsula, according to Erfort.

"During the early days of the Covid lockdowns, the newspaper was committed [to] reporting on the global pandemic in a way that was useful to local audiences," said Erfort.

By telling the stories of local community members on the frontlines, *False Bay Echo* continued to keep people in touch

with their communities when the physical barriers Covid-19 presented, withheld them from physically being with one another, added Erfort.

“It is often tricky and difficult to get under the skin of a particular community without being from there.”

The newspaper localised the national problem of loadshedding by focusing on the financial implications it posed to small businesses, said Yolanda du Preez, a journalist at *False Bay Echo*.

GRASSROOTS JOURNALISM

False Bay Echo uses grassroots journalism to address the gaps in the reporting of community organisations, and consults local experts for input on future stories or issues, said Erfort.

Grassroots journalism focuses on local angles or "reporting on how national or international issues may affect a particular community," said Tahlia Wyn-

gaard, a resident of the Ocean View community. Wyngaard is also a freelancer for *Global Network Africa*, a media company that publishes print and digital content in the financial sector, according to their website.

Grassroots journalists use their community ties to sustain relationships with a wide variety of sources from these different areas, said Erfort.

LOCAL SOURCES ARE KEY

Sourcing local contacts is an advantage to the publication because these are people who are aware of the issues being faced by that particular community, said Bobby Jordan, a senior re-

porter at the *Sunday Times*. "It is often tricky and difficult to get under the skin of a particular community without being from there," said Jordan, who added that finding reliable sources can be difficult for an outsider who will not have the same ties to the community.

THE WEEKLY DRILL

False Bay Echo finds that because publishing and distributing a weekly paper has time constraints, breaking news is covered by larger publications who report everyday, said Du Preez.

Newspapers struggle to remain up-to-date as news often only gets published a week after the story has happened, said Erfort.

The fight for editorial independence



Joseph Bracken & Anri van Helsdingen

For community newspapers, editorial independence is often compromised by commercial interests, according to Anton van Zyl, owner and manager at *Zoutpansberger* and editor at the *Limpopo Mirror*.

However, editorial independence is crucial for producing and maintaining quality journalism, said Van Zyl.

INTERFERENCE

"It is often a balancing act where businesses want free advertising, and the media outlet doesn't want to be exploited," said Van Zyl.

Advertisers might try to suppress the news when they are implicated in a story, claimed Van Zyl. But a way to combat this is to highlight the importance of uncovering these truths to the readers, added

Van Zyl. "The best [thing for the advertisers] would be to rather have an open channel to the news outlet where you know that your side will be reflected fairly," said Van Zyl.

Publications face pressures of bias when political bodies attempt to receive free advertising, although they "resist this firmly", said Dave Savides, editor-in-chief at *Zululand Observer*.

"All editorial should be



All editorial should be placed on newsworthy merit, not to please an advertiser.

[included based on] on newsworthy merit, not to please an advertiser," added Savides. "Readers should at all times be able to differentiate between editorial and advertorial content," said Irma Green, group editor at Caxton Local Media.

FINANCIAL PRESSURES

Financial insecurities can undermine editorial independence, and are thus concerning, said Kate Skinner, executive director at the Association of Independent Publishers.

Community publications dependent on "a single source of funding or advertising, are not going to be as editorially independent as they want to be", because they are dependent on that advertiser, explained Skinner. Community news outlets frequently experience

advertiser abuse because they lack the same financial protections that larger publications have, she added.

FIGHTING FOR A VOICE

When larger companies take over community newspapers, it becomes a "two-way street", meaning that it could be good or bad for editorial freedom, said Van Zyl.

When badly run independents are taken over, their editorial content may see an increase in quality, said Skinner.

However, it becomes problematic when larger media companies take over community publications and then "remote-control" them from the cities, said Van Zyl.

"We think it's better for publications to be based in the communities in which they serve," said Skinner.

"Sometimes big advertisers will threaten to pull their advertising if, for instance, they are implicated in a story. But we can't be influenced by it," said Irma Green, group editor at Caxton Local Media.

PHOTO: Joseph Bracken

But this may lead to a decentralisation of the production of local news content from outside of the actual community, added Skinner.

"Small local papers [are] used to represent a specific voice in the community, which also means a hands-on and very involved approach," said Van Zyl. "The further the ownership and decision-making process get removed from the area, the less chance of it maintaining a unique voice."

School newspapers and the shift to the digital era

Cheyenne Haas

As websites, email newsletters and social media have become the primary platforms on which news is consumed, high school newspapers are ceasing physical printing of their publications. This is according to Hannalie van Lill, Hoërskool Bellville's public relations and marketing manager.

Hoërskool Bellville's news publication, *Sapiens*, was established in 1963 and is one of South Africa's oldest Afrikaans high school publications, stated Van Lill. *Sapiens* is published digitally every term due to the cost of printing and space limitations of print, according to Roussouw Wentzel, the teacher in charge of the publication.

It is also printed physically, for archive purposes only, stated Wentzel.

Sapiens has also responded to technological demands by using WhatsApp as a distribution channel to approximately 1 200 of Hoërskool Bellville's school students, added Van Lill.

Sapiens is sold to students once a term via a WhatsApp subscription model at a cost of R20,

added Van Lill.

Hoërskool D.F. Malan's newspaper, *Die Herout*, has moved to become an online publication due to the high costs and long production time of a print publication, according to Alëta Fuchs, the head of the junior Afrikaans department at this school.

NATIONWIDE CONTENT

School newspapers have adapted to the digital environment by sharing their content to AWSUM News, said Lauren Adams, the account

manager at AWSUM News' parent company TieMedia. AWSUM News distributes school news nationally through print and digital content on their website and mobile application, she stated.

AWSUM News was created to bridge the digital communication gap and inform parents and pupils about school events, stated Michelle Davids, personal assistant to TieMedia's CEO, Durandt van Zyl. More than 2 000 schools in South Africa are currently subscribed to AWSUM News,

according to their website. These schools submit stories that are then grouped together in the newspaper by geographical location, said René Forbes, the Rustenburg Girls' High School's digital officer. The newspaper is then distributed to schools within that area, she said.

Hoërskool Bellville is one of the schools that contributes to AWSUM News, despite having its own in-house publication, said Van Lill. Many parents and pupils at the school utilise AWSUM News as it is a free alternative to *Sapiens*.

A TRAINING GROUND

A further initiative that aims to fill the gaps in scholarly journalism reporting happens through Words Open Worlds (WOW), a language empowerment project with a literacy focus that is run by Stellenbosch University's Woordfees. This is according to Fiona van Kerwel, WOW's project manager.

"The newspaper project [is aimed at teaching and creating] news for schools, by schools and about schools," stated Van Kerwel. WOW saw the need to improve the writing and reading skills of high school students who have a passion for journalism, and therefore started the newspaper project, said Van Kerwel.

Between 20 and 25 schools in the Stellenbosch, Paarl, Atlantis, Eerste Rivier, Strand and West Coast areas have participated in WOW's production workshops, she continued.

It teaches important journalistic tools and skills, such as how to conduct interviews, correctly capture and package news, and how to properly formulate articles for various platforms, stated Van Kerwel.



Once students from the various schools involved in the Words Open World's (WOW) newspaper have finished the publication, it is printed by WOW, said Fiona van Kerwel, WOW's project manager. PHOTO: Mia van der Merwe



'Good news' is not no news

Jess Holing

It is impossible to tune out society's harsh realities that dominate news cycles. However, the number of news publications that cover positive news has gradually increased.

This is according to Carissa Drury, head of content for Ginkgo Agency based in Cape Town and *Beautiful News*, a content platform that shares one positive story every day, according to their website.

The media, specifically community news publications, have a unique role to play in "[empowering] people to adjust the way they respond to the news and [showing] that for every challenge, there are people willing to actively participate in their communities to find the solution", added Drury.

'NOT THE ONLY STORY'

"If you chase 'good' news for the sake of spreading 'good' news, you are not a truthful messenger

of society," said Anton van Zyl, editor of the *Limpopo Mirror*, an independent community newspaper. "It is just as important to share news about achievements, as it is to share news of the outcome of a court case," he added.

The media's watchdog role in documenting social injustices contributes to the negativity and heaviness of the news, said Nathan Geffen, the editor of *GroundUp*, a news agency that focuses on human rights reporting from marginalised communities.

"That downside is massively counterweighted by the fact that publications reporting the problems in society actually help society to improve," said Geffen.

It is problematic when community newspapers steer away from controversial issues to avoid losing advertising, stated Geffen.



For every challenge, there are people willing to actively participate in their communities to find the solution.

GOOD NEWS TAKES TIME

Although a "doom and gloom", mentality is perpetuated by fast-paced fake news and sensationalism, positive news is often unnoticed as a trend or event the way 'bad' news is, stated Stuart Pennington, CEO of SA *The Good News*, a news website highlighting South Africa's positive developments, based in KwaZulu-Natal. "[Positive news] happens quite

slowly. So it isn't always all that newsworthy, but it's important that it be part of our narrative," said Pennington, who also mentors young journalists that submit stories to SA *The Good News* about ordinary people in their communities.

Thorough research is needed to produce a balanced and informed narrative that reflects what is really happening in the country, added Pennington.

UPLIFTING STORIES

Community media plays an important role in focusing on uplifting stories, according to Liesl Smit, news manager at Smile 904 FM, a radio station providing 'news that Cape Town needs to know now'.

Smile 904 FM believes in "[empowering] readers and listeners to make changes, help others to take action and take pride in themselves and their communities", by sharing stories in the community and educating people about what

is happening in their world, she added.

Residents feel more positive about their communities and are more inclined to contribute when they are aware of the initiatives taking place, according to Pennington.

This fosters "a mind-set of actively searching for solutions rather than being overwhelmed by negativity", stated Drury.

This site has circulated more than 1 300 positive stories and achieved 459 million views in the last three years, according to their website.

Constructive journalism is not necessarily lacking, but its distribution in communities is compromised, said Drury. By strengthening relationships with community leaders and grassroots organisations, news publications can better ensure a wider reach for constructive journalism, added Drury.

Plaaslike media het 'n rol te speel in seksvoorligting

Keziah Bailey

Gemeenskapspublikasies het 'n groot rol te speel wat betref verslagdoening oor statutêre verkrachtings en tienerswangerskappe. Dit is volgens Yael Malgas, 'n joernalis vir *Weslander*. Malgas meen dat dit publikasies se verantwoordelikheid is om 'n gesprek te begin en hulp in die vorm van inligting aan lesers te bied.

Volgens Saldanhabaai-munisipaliteit se amptelike webtuiste is 13,2% van die vroue wat in die 2021/2022-jaar in dié streek geboorte geskenk het, tussen die ouderdomme van 10 en 19.

GEBREK AAN SEKSUELE OPVOEDING

Een van die hoofredes vir hierdie hoë persentasie tienerswangerskappe is oningeligtheid oor seks. Dit is volgens Deirdre Karolus, 'n maatskaplike werker by die Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouevereniging (ACVV) in St. Helenabaai.

Geloof speel 'n rol in gebrekkige seksuele opvoeding, het Karolus gesê. "In sommige gelowige wêreldes is 'n sensitiewe onderwerp beskou waaroor daar nie juis gepraat mag word tot 'n sekere ouderdom bereik is nie."

STATUTÊRE VERKRACHTINGS

In 2021/2022 is 84 seksuele misdrywe in die Weskusstreek aangemeld, volgens Saldanhabaai-munisipaliteit se amptelike webtuiste. Dié statistieke stem na-genoeg ooreen met 2020's n, toe 93 seksuele misdrywe aangemeld is.



Daar bestaan steeds 'n stigma rondom tienerswangerskap en in my ervaring is vroue eers bereid om jare later oor hul ervaring te praat, veral in kleiner dorpe waar 'almal almal ken'.

Desiree Stevens, 'n verpleegster by die Paternoster-kliniek, meen dat armoede en statutêre verkrachting verband hou met mekaar, aangesien die ouer per-

soon gewoonlik 'n salaris verdien waarby die slagoffer kan baat en so ook aan hul families se behoeftes voorsien.

Sy het gesê dat slagoffers hulself dikwels nie as slagoffers sien nie. "Meeste gevalle [vind] binne die onmiddellike spatie van die slagoffers se daaglikse omgang met die oortreders plaas," het Stevens gesê.

Maryke Swart, redakteur van *Weslander*, meen dat die media 'n opvoedkundige rol speel in die verspreiding van inligting met betrekking tot die kwessie van statutêre verkrachting. Die samelewing moet deeglik ingelig word aangaande hoe om die vroeë tekens van sogenaamde "grooming" te kan raak sien, het sy gesê.

SKRYF OMSIGTIG

Volgens Malgas is dit moeilik om individue te kry wat bereid is om oor die kwessies te gesels. "Daar bestaan steeds 'n stigma rondom tienerswangerskap en in my ervaring is vroue eers bereid om jare later oor hul ervaring te praat, veral in kleiner dorpe waar 'almal almal ken,' het sy gesê.

Wanneer dit by seksuele misdrywe kom, wys wetstoepassers duidelik uit wat die media aan die publiek bekend kan maak, het Malgas gesê.

Dit is belangrik dat die identiteit van minderjariges wat by 'n saak betrokke

is, ten alle koste beskerm word, volgens Swart.

Indien die kind se pa aangekla word van verkrachting, mag hy nie geïdentifiseer word nie, selfs al het hy in die hof getuig, het Swart verduidelik.

Maryke Swart, redakteur van *Weslander*, meen dat die media 'n opvoedkundige rol speel in die verspreiding van inligting met betrekking tot dié kwessie. FOTO: Keziah Bailey



Telling the story, hand-in-hand

Hannah Theron

Working with non-profit organisations (NPO) is highly beneficial for community news organisations because they have extensive community connections. This is according to Heleen Rossouw, a journalist at *Paarl Post*, a Media24-owned regional newspaper.

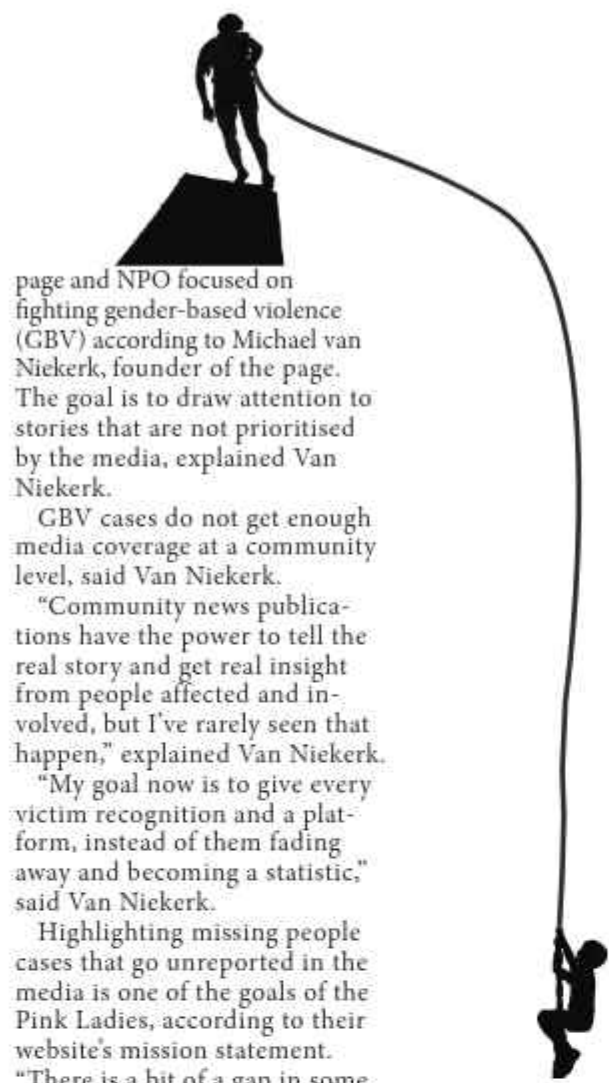
Paarl Post recently collaborated with Action Society, an NPO that advocates for a reformed justice system, in the ongoing case of Siphokazi Boo's murder, said Rossouw. Action Society covers the court proceedings and relays the information to *Paarl Post*, explained Rossouw.

"We do believe it's very important to work with [community] publications [...] because the impact [of the work] is greater," said Jacqui Thomas, director and co-founder of the NPO, The Pink Ladies Organisation for Missing Children.

Pink Ladies once worked with *The Centurion Rekord*, a community publication based in Pretoria, in the search for Betholomeus Henry Eiberg, a young man who was later found deceased after being missing for six months, said Thomas. Usually, though, Pink Ladies' collaborations with community publications mainly entail educating the public on how to report and avoid kidnappings, explained Thomas.

NOT ENOUGH COVERAGE

Keep the Energy is an Instagram



page and NPO focused on fighting gender-based violence (GBV) according to Michael van Niekerk, founder of the page. The goal is to draw attention to stories that are not prioritised by the media, explained Van Niekerk.

GBV cases do not get enough media coverage at a community level, said Van Niekerk.

"Community news publications have the power to tell the real story and get real insight from people affected and involved, but I've rarely seen that happen," explained Van Niekerk. "My goal now is to give every victim recognition and a platform, instead of them fading away and becoming a statistic," said Van Niekerk.

Highlighting missing people cases that go unreported in the media is one of the goals of the Pink Ladies, according to their website's mission statement. "There is a bit of a gap in some media," claimed Thomas. "[The media] jumps onto the sordid details. [...] They seem more intent on [producing content] than actually helping to find the missing person."

STAYING INDEPENDENT

News publications should ensure that they do not become a mouth-piece for any particular organisation, said Angelo Julies, editor at *Eikestadmus*, a Media24-owned community newspaper based in Stellenbosch. It is crucial for news publications to maintain editorial independence when working with NPOs, added Julies.

THE NEWS AGENDA

"I personally feel the readership fails to acknowledge that they have power over what news gets covered most," said Roussouw.



[NPOs] can provide valuable insights and access to stories that might not be easily accessible to reporters otherwise.

Pink Ladies has a good line of communication with community news publications. However, they do not actively seek out the media, according to Thomas.

Their goal is not to sensationalise or "create the news", so they let the ones that are eager to help contact them, stated Thomas.

"*Paarl Post* would never say no to an NPO, unless any given request might clash with our corporate policy," said Roussouw.

Alberton Record, a community publication owned by Caxton Local Media and based in Alberton Gauteng, works with NPOs as often as necessary and if space allows. This is according to Carina van der Walt, editor of the *Alberton Record*.

Hard news takes precedence, explained Rossouw, and therefore stories that reach them through NPOs might not always get published.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Collaborations between NPOs and news publications are beneficial as "[NPOs] can provide valuable insights and access to stories that might not be easily accessible to reporters otherwise", added Julies.

Cases of child abuse and GBV are rampant, but are not always written about because publications would follow the story with the strongest human interest angle, and that would get the most readers, stated Roussouw.

Keep the Energy does not work with community news but would be open to collaborations, according to Van Niekerk. "I think it would be a powerful combination. I know I am definitely willing. I just don't know if the publications would be," said Van Niekerk.

Kimberley se stryd teen geslagsgebaseerde geweld

Sebastian Paulus

Kimberley, die hoofstad van die Noord-Kaap, worstel tans met 'n toename in geslagsgebaseerde geweld. Tussen April en Junie 2022 is 314 gevalle van seksuele misdade in die Noord-Kaap aangemeld, volgens statistieke wat op die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiediens (SAPD) se amptelike webtuiste geplaas is. Dit is teenoor 290 gevalle in die ooreenstemmende tydperk van die vorige jaar. In die derde kwartaal van 2022, was die syfer 372.

Volgens kapt. Tessa Jansen, polisiewoordvoerder van Kimberley, het die toename in voorvalle van huishoudelike mishandeling, seksuele mishandeling en ander vorme van geweld

teen vroue, verskeie lede in die gemeenskap onveilig en kwesbaar laat voel.

TEKORTKOMINGE IN GEMEENSKAPSMEDIA

Volgens Helena Barnard, redakteur van die *NoordkaapBulletin*, het 'n gemeenskapskoerant nie die jurisdiksie om misdadigers verantwoordelik te hou nie. "Ons kan net oor polisieverslae

verslag doen en hofsake bywoon."

Daar is tans slegs twee gedrukte koerante in die Kimberley-omgewing, naamlik *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (DPA) en die *NoordkaapBulletin*. Dit is volgens Barnard 'n groot uitdaging.

Sy is boonop die enigste joernalis van *NoordkaapBulletin* wat in Kimberley woon. Dit stel verdere beperkinge.

"Dit is onmoontlik om oor alles verslag te doen wat in die gebied gebeur weens afstand, tyd en 'n tekort aan hulpbronne," het Barnard gesê.

Terwyl stories aangaande geslagsgeweld beslis nie heeltemal uitgelaat word nie, gee *NoordkaapBulletin* nie noodwendig voorkeur aan sulke stories nie, het Barnard gesê. "Ons doen net verslag oor stories van geslagsgeweld wat ons

ontvang en baie keer kan daar nie deeglik oor verslag gedoen word nie, weens die regsimplikasies en lang hofsake," het sy gesê.

BESKERM SLAGOFFERS

Volgens Jess Dewhurst, uitvoerende hoof van Justice Desk Africa, 'n organisasie sonder winsoogmerk, is die blamering van slagoffers 'n groot probleem. "In plaas van die slagoffers blameer, moet ons hulle eerder beskerm."

Dit is ook volgens Dewhurst baie belangrik vir joernaliste om die storie deur die oog van die slagoffer te vertel. "Mense mag statistieke vergeet, maar hulle sal nooit 'n gesig vergeet nie," het Dewhurst gesê. Gemeenskapspublikasies moet altyd verseker dat hulle die regte kanale volg wanneer hulle oor sensitiewe kwessies soos geslagsgebaseerde geweld verslag doen. "Gemeenskapskoerante het

die plig om die gemeenskap in te lig, maar dit moet altyd op so 'n manier gedoen word dat dit nie slagoffers opnuut traumatiseer nie," het sy bygevoeg.

Amy Cotterrell, navorsings-koördineerder van die Studente vir Reg en Sosiale Geregtigheidsorganisasie aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch, het gesê dat gemeenskapsmedia altyd op 'n sensitiewe en etiese manier moet optree met die verslaggewing oor geslagsgeweld.

"Volgens deel 16 van die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet, word daar aan aanklaers opdrag gegee om getuies se identiteit te beskerm. Dit is ook duidelik dat die identiteit en beskerming van alle slagoffers 'n prioriteit moet wees vir koerante wanneer daar verslag gedoen word oor geslagsgeweld. As 'n regstudent het ek die belangrikheid hiervan gesien," het Cotterrell gesê.

Om gesinsgeweld aan te meld, kontak die SAPD se noodnommer by: 086 001 0111. Vir enige navrae, kontak kapt. Tessa Jansen, Kimberley SAPD se kommunikasiebeampte, by: 084 958 4883.

"Gemeenskapskoerante het die plig om die gemeenskap in te lig, maar dit moet altyd op so 'n manier gedoen word dat dit nie slagoffers opnuut traumatiseer nie," het Jess Dewhurst van Justice Desk Africa gesê. FOTO: Sebastian Paulus



The queer blindspot

Liam Voorma & Sebastian Paulus



"Without financial backing, LGBTQ+ media in South Africa is drastically limited in what we can cover and the depth to which we can cover it," said Luiz de Barros, editor of *Mambaonline.com*, South Africa's largest gay news and lifestyle website. PHOTO: Joseph Bracken

The underrepresentation and neglect of the LGBTQ+ community is particularly prevalent in reporting by community media outlets, according to Livio del Gallo, co-creator and founder of *GaySA*, a community radio station based in Pretoria.

The station provides a platform for LGBTQ+ individuals to share their stories, said Del Gallo.

While there are community newspapers that carry LGBTQ+ stories, they lack the relevance needed to provide relatable voices, and positive stories, to the queer community, said Del Gallo.

It becomes problematic when the purpose of community news outlets is to provide a platform that caters towards all individuals within a community, yet the marginalised voices are unheard, Del Gallo added.

REPRESENTATION

With limited mainstream reporting of LGBTQ+ issues, the media often fails to provide important context and background and is written from a non-queer perspective, said Luiz de Barros, editor of *Mambaonline.com*, South Africa's largest gay news and lifestyle website. It also tends to sensationalise incidents by focusing on hate crimes and other violent events, said De Barros.

LGBTQ+ stories are often shared on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but few news publications cover these stories, according to De Barros.

Community media's representation of the LGBTQ+ community plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards the queer community,

stated Del Gallo. "We must ensure that they provide fair and accurate coverage of LGBTQ+ stories in order to promote greater understanding and acceptance," said Del Gallo.



We must ensure that they provide fair and accurate coverage of LGBTQ+ stories in order to promote greater understanding and acceptance.

MODERN MARGINALISATION

The biggest challenge facing LGBTQ+ media houses such as *GaySA*, "is the lack of support from advertisers and funders," said De Barros. Companies and brands within South Africa fail to see the value of creating a relationship with the LGBTQ+ community, through LGBTQ+ media, De Barros added.

"Without financial backing, LGBTQ+ media in South Africa is drastically limited in what we can cover and the depth to which we can cover it," said De Barros.

QUEER EXPERIENCE

"I feel like I'm hardly ever impressed when I see queer repre-

sentation in community publications," said Josh Langeveldt, a queer student at the University of Cape Town. "Because homophobia is everywhere, queer people never know whether they are safe, so voicing their concerns is always an anxious and uncertain thing."

There is no particular safe place where queer people can voice the concerns and issues that they have, said Langeveldt. He also expressed doubt about queer representation, and stated that queer people who are socially marginalised cannot have their concerns taken seriously.

HIGH LEVELS OF EXCLUSION

South Africa has been praised for its progressive laws and policies regarding LGBTQ+ rights, including the legalisation of same sex marriage and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, said Del Gallo.

But despite these legal advancements, many LGBTQ+ individuals in South Africa still face exclusion, high levels of violence, discrimination and marginalisation also within community newspapers, stated Del Gallo.

"There [are] ongoing debates and controversies in South Africa around issues such as the rights of transgender individuals and the extent to which LGBTQ+ individuals are fully included in society," he added.

Representation within LGBTQ+ community media can be a catalyst to develop a stronger sense of community and queer identity which in turn gives this community the power to create change, said Del Gallo.

Krag van positiewe verslaggewing oor hawelose mense

Stefani Terblanche

Verslaggewing oor hoe party hawelose mense hul lewens verander, het beslis 'n positiewe effek op haweloses. Dit is volgens Franita Knudsen, die bestuurder, fondinsamelaar en hoof van bemerking by Mould Empower Serve (MES) se Durbenville-tak. MES is 'n organisasie sonder winsoogmerk wat aan volhoubare oplossings vir hendaagse armoede werk, volgens Knudsen.

Haweloosheid is 'n probleem in Durbanville en die gemeenskap het verdeelde opinies oor die kwessie, het Esmé Erasmus, senior joernalis by *TygerBurger* Durbanville, vertel. Koerantberigte oor mense wat deur MES gehelp is en die gevolglike positiewe veranderinge in hul lewe, help die gemeenskap om te sien dat haweloses ook net mense is wat hulself en hul omstandighede wil verbeter, het Erasmus gesê.

VOLGEHOUE MOTIVERING

Positiewe nuus dien as motivering vir hawelose mense by MES.



Ek kon nie glo dat die Here my regtig [van] die grond af opgetel het en my hier geplaas het nie.



"Jy weet nie hoeveel mense op daai [oomblik] die koerant lees nie. En miskien praat die *Lord* met hulle in *mysterious ways*." Dit is volgens Sidwell Julius, 'n hawelose man wat deel is van 'n program by die organisasie sonder winsoogmerk Mould Empower Serve (MES). FOTO: Mia van der Merwe

Marietta Lombard: From intern to editor

Joseph Bracken

Marietta Lombard is passionate about serving her community and passing her knowledge down to the next generation of journalists. She is leading community news in a constantly challenging environment.

As a young student, Marietta Lombard was torn between studying drama, or pursuing a career in journalism. But then her brother was murdered, and a national newspaper got the details wrong. It wrongfully identified her brother as the accused and the perpetrator as the victim.

She decided to pursue journalism. "There's a drive in me to make sure that, as far as possible, you know, I'm not responsible for putting a family through that," said Lombard.

Lombard, who started as an intern at *Bedfordview Edenvale News* in 1998, today oversees 34 community newspapers in the greater Johannesburg metro.

"It's important for community journalists to add their voice to the world [of] media to make sure that we stay free to report on what we need to report," said Lombard. "We hold those in power accountable — whether it's a ward councillor or a president, it's our job."

PAVING A PATH

As a cub journalist she never had one particular beat. "The beauty of community journalism is that you write about everything," she said.

The community newsroom is a great training ground to advance skills as "our multimedia storytellers do hard news, community news, municipal issues, sports, schools, everything," said Lombard.



Marietta Lombard, editor-in-chief of Caxton Local Media for the greater Johannesburg metro, and executive director of the Forum of Community Journalists. PHOTO: Supplied/Carmen Norton.

KEY TO SUCCESS

"It's constantly challenging to make sure the newspapers survive. Be it to ensure that ethical journalism stays within the newsroom, or that you stay in touch with your readers, or training journalists," she said.

Although based in Germiston, Lombard currently spends most of each week overseeing the relaunch of *Johannesburg North Newspaper*.

The relaunch includes a pilot programme with Johannesburg north community-focused content, said Lombard.



A reader of the *Kempton Express* standing outside a convenience store. The *Kempton Express* is one of the newspapers that Marietta Lombard is currently editor-in-chief of. PHOTO: Joseph Bracken

The secret to keeping publications alive in a challenging economic climate is being embedded in the community, explained Lombard. You're writing about people that you've forged relationships with, she added.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

A lot of people reconnected with community news during the pandemic, said Lombard. They could get the statistics from the national news, but if they wanted

to know about their neighbour, they had to check their local newspaper, she said.



She saw our talents and always reminded us thereof and continually encouraged it.

There were lots of emails coming through stating, "it feels like you guys are my only connection to the outside world," said Lombard.

At her son's rugby games, community members often come up to ask, "Did you see that nonsense down the road? Are you guys gonna do something about it?" said Lombard.

PASSING THE TORCH

"She always reminds us that we are the hope of voice to our respective communities," said Puleng Sekabate, a former senior journalist at Caxton Local Media. Lombard understands the privilege that community journalists have, added Sekabate.

"She saw our talents and always reminded us thereof and continually encouraged it," said Heleen Rossouw, a mid-senior level journalist at *Paarl Post*. Rossouw worked as a junior journalist at *Kempton Express* between 2020 and 2021, where Lombard was the group editor. Working under Lombard made her feel fearless and allowed her confidence to blossom, stated Rossouw.

"I love developing young talent and saying, you know, 'In 10 years you're gonna be in the editor's chair.' It gives me hope for the future for a solid, strong journalism industry," said Lombard.

Die stem agter die sukses van 90.6FM

Anri van Helsdingen

Vir baie mense in die Vaalderhoek is 90.6FM sinoniem met Marius Dreyer. Dié gemeenskapsradiostasie het in 1996 begin en Dreyer het vir sowat 25 van die stasie se 27 bestaansjare as omroeper daar gewerk.

Dreyer het in 1984 na sy diensplig as klankman by die Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie (SAUK) gaan werk. "Wanneer jy agter die mikrofoon inskuif, moet jy vlinders in jou maag hê, en as dit nie meer daar is nie, dan moet jy dit los." Sô het Sarel

Marais, Dreyer se mentor by die SAUK, destyds vir hom gesê. Dreyer het in 1996, kort nadat 90.6FM begin uitsaai het, as omroeper by die stasie aangesluit.

DIE VLINDERS BLY

"Alhoewel ek nie meer radio doen nie, het ek vandag weer vlinders in my maag gehad. Ek is besig met TV en dit is dieselfde gevoel. Dit is die adrenalin wat my vir jare elke keer soos 'n magneet getrek het," het Dreyer gesê.

Dreyer is tans 'n aanbieder op sy eie TV-geselsprogram, *Kuier Saam Met*, wat op Sedibeng TV uitgesaai word.

Die geselsprogram het elke week 'n nuwe bekende Afrikaanse kunstenaar as gas, en die fokus word geplaas op die mens agter die kunstenaar, volgens Dreyer.

Refentse Morake, 'n bekende Afrikaanse sanger, het in die Vaalderhoek grootgeword. Hy meen dat gemeenskapsradio een van die belangrikste hoekstene in 'n kunstenaar se lewe is.

"Mense komplimenteer my stem en hulle dink dit is die belangrikste deel van my loopbaan. Gemeenskapsradio was die eerste luidspreker waardeur ek my emosies en sienswyse vir die Suid-Afrikaanse publiek kon voordra," het Morake vertel.

HY GEE OM

"Toe ons daai tyd begin het met gemeenskapsradio was daar nie professionele omroepers nie," het Dreyer gesê.

Sy liefde en bekwaamheid as omroeper het die stasie se sukses bepaal, meen Zachele Howard, voormalige omroeper by 90.6FM.

"Marius het byvoorbeeld die *Blanket Drive* gereël, en het jaarliks komerse ingesamel vir mense wat dit in die winter benodig het," het Howard vertel.



Dit is 'n leefwyse en mense gaan selde weg.

"Marius het kontakte van besighede gehad wat hy gebruik het om ander mense se lewens beter te maak. En, hy doen dit steeds." "Wanneer groot maatskappye soos Sasol betrokke raak by gemeenskapsradio, het dit 'n fenomenale impak op die gemeenskap," het Dreyer gesê.

Alarms gaan af in die ateljee van 90.6FM wanneer iets verkeerd loop by Sasol se aanleg



Marius Dreyer, voormalige omroeper by 90.6FM, se liefde en bekwaamheid as omroeper het die stasie se sukses bepaal, het Zachele Howard, voormalige omroeper by 90.6FM, gesê. FOTO: Anri van Helsdingen

in die Vaalderhoek, het Dreyer vertel.

"Die gemeenskap weet dan om ingesakel te bly op 90.6FM, want hulle sal vir jou die inligting gee wat jy nodig het," het Dreyer aan SMF gesê.

Chris Swartz en John Rixon het dié radiostasie gestig, maar

Gilbert Antunes, wat in daardie tyd as 'n programmeerder by die radiostasie gewerk het, is vandag die uitvoerende hoof, volgens Dreyer.

"Dit is 'n leefwyse en mense gaan selde weg, want die werksomgewing is net so aangenaam," het Dreyer gesê.

Linguistic diversity, the lifeblood of community radio



Amy Cloete



"It is a basic human right to have your language [represented] in the media," said Dr Jeanne du Toit, head of the school of journalism and media studies at Rhodes University. PHOTO: Amy Cloete

Radio stations need to incorporate language diversity through multilingual broadcasting as South Africa is a linguistically diverse country. This is according to Larry Matlala, co-founder and operations manager at Cape Town Radio, an independent radio station that broadcasts in

English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. The station has approximately 150 000 monthly listeners.

"English in particular is wholly overrepresented in the media space," said Dr Jeanne du Toit, head of the school of journalism and media studies at Rhodes University. South Africa has a linguistic vari-

ety of 11 official languages. isiZulu speakers make up 22.7% of the population, while first-language English speakers make up 9.6%, according to the South African History Website. Radio broadcasting in South Africa involves a three-tier structure of commercial, public and community radio, explained Du Toit. Community radio exists to "serve the public good [and] be a resource for citizens," stated Du Toit.

Community radio stations are largely dependent on sponsors and "selling [their] air time," for funding, said Matlala. In contrast, "mainstream radio [stations]," have more

access to funding through corporate sponsors and their "networks and connections," he explained.

LANGUAGE IDENTITY

"Languages are so key to people's identity and their culture, their sense of self and their power, that opening up spaces for languages other than English is crucial for community radio," said Du Toit.

Community radio stations create a space where the public can "actively participate and tell their own story," said King Ngavu, chief content officer for Gugs FM, an independent radio station based in Cape Town, that broadcasts in English and isiXhosa, with approximately 300 000 monthly listeners.

CAPTURING HEARTS

"If the station within my community uses my language and style of communication, then that radio wins my heart and attention. So language use and style is very vital when it comes to radio," stated Matlala.

Language "plays a major role in the usefulness of [radio] to the populace," as important information can

be lost in translation if not offered in a language that listeners can understand, explained Ngavu.

RADIO OWNERSHIP

There are approximately 292 community stations in South Africa, according to the Broadcast Research Council (BRC) of South Africa. The community radio station with the largest audience, of approximately 421 000 listeners per week, is Jozi FM which broadcasts in English, isiZulu, Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana, according to the BRC's website.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) owns 18 radio stations, according to the official SABC website. Ukhozi FM, an isiZulu station owned by the SABC is currently the most listened-to station in South Africa, with an audience of approximately 7 686 000 weekly listeners, according to the BRC's website.

Inside the box: The importance of local TV stations

Stefani Terblanche

Community television is imperative, as it deals with stories that commercial media often do not tell, such as the problems that specific communities face. This is according to Glenda Neville, news editor at Cape Town Daily on Cape Town TV.

Cape Town TV is one of five licensed community television stations in South Africa and was founded in 2006 by over 200 non-profit organisations, according to Mike Aldridge, broadcasting manager at Cape Town TV. It has a daily viewership of around 175 000, with target audiences in the Cape Flats and townships in Cape Town, according to Cape Town TV's February viewership statistics.

"[We target] Cape Flats and the townships, because we always feel that they are not given a voice on TV to tell their story," said Edna Cangola, senior reporter, social media manager and news anchor at Cape Town Daily. "[Community television] is a very important part of our media landscape," said Neville. "You cannot always have this top-down media. We have to have media from the ground up."

CREATING A DIFFERENCE

Residents are given the opportunity to help create a difference for the community, said Kezia Lategan, a presenter of Ekse Live on Cape Town TV. This is done by inviting role models within communities to appear as show guests, according to Lwandile Zulu, a presenter of Ekse Live. It



Working at Cape Town TV allows a person to take on multiple roles, according to Edna Cangola, senior reporter, social media manager and news anchor at Cape Town Daily. PHOTO: Stefani Terblanche



That show gives them a platform [with the hope] that more people will join and not fall victim to their surroundings.

serves as a motivator for people to change their lives, she added.

One of their shows that is making a difference is *Positively, Proudly Hanover Park*, which launched its second season in April. This is according to Maygan Booysen,

content producer and production coordinator for Cape Town TV.

"The show covers all the good that happens within Hanover Park to help break the stereotypes that fall on the community [...] That show gives them a platform [with the hope] that more people will join and not fall victim to their surroundings," said Booysen.

DIGITAL MIGRATION

Community television is facing a large problem with funding, said Neville. With the proposed shift from analogue to digital terrestrial television (DTT), Cape Town TV's cost of broadcasting will increase by 2 900%, said Aldridge. This is because more transmitters need to be purchased for DTT which will enable Cape Town TV to broadcast

on the same frequency as multiple other broadcasters, he said.

Decoders are essential to DTT and viewers who do not receive them from the government would need to purchase their own, or invest in digital television with a built-in DTT tuner, Aldridge said. There is a worry that since Cape Town TV's target audience is from lower living standard measure (LSM) groups, that their viewership will decrease as a result, said Aldridge.

DTT is supposed to reduce the cost of broadcasting and has been in the works since 2008, he continued. But fifteen years later and another deferred cut-off on 31 March 2023 proves that there is difficulty with its feasibility, said Aldridge.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

The Grow Channel, an aspiring community television station, has found that the largest barrier to obtaining their broadcasting licence is the cost, stated Majota Kambule, its spokesperson.

In order to obtain a broadcasting licence, one has to apply to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and fulfil the requirements of the Electronic Communications Act of 2004 and the ICASA Community Broadcasting Services Regulations, added Aldridge.

The cost of launching and operating a television station is another challenge The Grow Channel is facing, according to Kambule. "This cost 'can range from tens of millions to hundreds of millions of rands'," he said.

"The bigger the world gets, the more information [comes to] us. There is a sense that we need to be stronger within our communities," said Glenda Neville, news editor and mentor at Cape Town Daily on Cape Town TV. PHOTO: Stefani Terblanche



"Dit is die adrenalin wat my vir jare elke keer soos 'n magneet getrek het," het Marius Dreyer, voormalige omroeper by 90.6FM, gesê. FOTO: Anri van Helsdingen

CREDIT: Freepik



Financial pressures threaten longevity of community radio

Talia Kincaid

Community radio in South Africa (SA) boasts a healthy audience of over 8.5 million weekly listeners across approximately 290 stations, according to the Broadcast Research Council's (BRC) Radio Audience Measurement Survey (RAMS). But stations are facing looming closures due to financial pressures, said Dr Tanja Bosch, professor of media studies at the University of Cape Town.

"There is simply not enough money to go around and service all the existing radio stations in SA," said Bosch.

"When community radio stations were set up, they relied on volunteers who offered their labour for free, [but] these days the current economic climate makes it difficult to keep recruiting."

Even Bush Radio, SA's oldest community radio station, according to the Journal of Radio Studies, is facing financial precarity, said Brenda Leonard, Bush Radio's operations manager. Established in 1992 as an alternative broadcaster, Bush programmes in English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa from central Cape Town.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

"Community radio's funding will always be a challenge," said Gool-

am Fakier, radio presenter at Voice of the Cape. "As community broadcaster[s], we have [no] board of directors, investors or funders."

Bush Radio's funding model consists of grants, training fees, sponsorships, and advertising, according to Leonard.

"There were times where people might not be paid for the month, but they still rock[ed] up to work," said Leonard. "Covid-19 hit community media very hard [and many] businesses stopped advertising, or reduced their [advertising] budget."



There were times where people might not be paid for the month, but they still rock[ed] up to work.

An additional challenge is paying Sentech, SA's state-owned communications network service provider, said Leonard. Sentech provides 150 national community stations with broadcasting transmission services for approximate-

ly R180 000 per station yearly, according to their website.

"[National] community broadcasting is in arrears with Sentech for R100 million," stated Leonard, who added that Sentech has had to suspend community stations due to an accumulation of insufficient payments. Meeting notes from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group confirmed that community radio accounted for R60 million of this debt.

STATISTICAL INACCURACIES

"[Bush] doesn't feel that the BRC speaks to our audiences. It takes a certain level of media literacy to participate [and] we have a lot of listeners in informal settlements [who cannot partake in the BRC's surveys] which immediately cuts our audiences," explained Leonard.

BRC RAMS' 2022 national survey found that Bush Radio's audience comprised 59 000 listeners within a 7-day period, but an independent survey conducted by Bush placed their listenership at 275 000, according to Bush Radio's website. Advertisers reduce their airtime rates based on the BRC's recorded figures, said Leonard.

Social media has also become a source of contention for Bush Radio as advertisers are hesitant to invest in online audiences,



Shifting the narrative of community radio's audience from marginalised to group-specific will assist them in retaining advertisers, said Brenda Leonard, Bush Radio's operations manager. PHOTO: Talia Kincaid

added Leonard.

"If we look at Bush's Facebook of 22 000 followers, we should charge 10% of that audience [for R2 200]," said Leonard. "But [the advertisers] say no, that's too expensive [...]. Eventually, we sell for R1 000 which is half of what we should be selling."

A COMMUNITY FORCE

"We try to sell a story – a connection," stated Leonard.

Voice of the Cape echoes this ethos. "[Community radio is about being] on the ground. We know what the issues are, and we bring these issues to light," said Fakier.

About 70% of Bush Radio's content programming is produced by volunteers from the community, said Leonard, who added that the station reflects a safe space for community members to feel heard by getting involved.

SMF CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Hints

Down

- Written or spoken by humans.
- To give someone more control over their life.
- The obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions. ("Yes, it was me.")
- A broadcast medium.
- Gutenberg invented this machine.
- When you have an aim or intention in mind you have a...? (Also a Justin Bieber album title)
- SMF editor-in-chief's home town.
- A social media website where you can poke a friend.

Across

- To alter/modify something to make it different. (It is as good as a holiday!)
- When a newspaper is available online, it is sometimes referred to as the ... version?
- Cayley Clifford is the deputy editor of what organisation?
- A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.
- A person writing an article for a newspaper.
- Community news publications' biggest obstacle.
- Protective rails (a fence or other obstacle that prevents movement, access or growth).
- The sound produced in a person's larynx and uttered through the mouth, as speech or song.
- 90.6fm's previous host's surname.
- The main means of mass communication (papers, TV, radio etc.) regarded collectively.
- Intense sorrow, especially caused by someone's death.
- This newspaper's title.

