



A NEW CITIZEN VISION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING

The “SOS: Support Public Broadcasting” Coalition (SOS Coalition) is a membership-based coalition representing trade unions, independent film and TV production sector organisations; non-governmental and community-based organisations, academics, freedom of expression activists and concerned individuals.

The SOS vision is to create a public broadcasting system dedicated to the broadcasting of quality, diverse, citizen-orientated public programming committed to social justice and the deepening of South Africa’s Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights including socio-economic rights.

The Coalition applauds the commitment made by the Ministry and Department of Communications on 2 September 2011 to embark on a comprehensive broadcasting policy review process, including the development of a Broadcasting Green Paper, Broadcasting White Paper, and detailed recommendations for new legislation.

The SOS Coalition believes that the following **PRINCIPLES** should be reflected in new broadcasting laws:

1. Public broadcasting – SABC and community broadcasters

Public broadcasting must strengthen the goals of our Constitution, especially the Bill of Rights, including socio-economic rights. Further, every person in SA should be able to receive both radio and television programming in their home language. The public and community broadcasters must have institutional autonomy and be independent of commercial, government and party political interests.

2. Public programming – SABC and community broadcasters

SABC programming must be based on the principles of credibility, reliability, variety and balance. It must reflect the full range of South African opinions but in particular focus on views traditionally marginalised by the commercial media. The public broadcasting sector must lead the way in local content production. Community broadcasting programming must reflect the variety of views in geographical communities or within communities of interest.

3. The SABC Charter

A new SABC Charter - that commits the broadcaster to the broadcasting of cutting edge, citizen orientated programming - must be developed through a consultative process between government and stakeholders. It should be reviewed and updated regularly.

4. SABC editorial policies

The SABC’s editorial policies must be reviewed, updated and implemented to ensure the SABC plays its watchdog role and caters for all audiences in the forthcoming digital multi-channel environment, in particular, it should ensure that those marginalised are catered for.

5. Protection of journalists – SABC and community broadcasters

Journalists in the SABC and in community broadcasters must be protected from outside vested interests so that they can play their key information gathering and dissemination roles in the interest of citizens and their audiences.

6. Improving programming quality – SABC and community broadcasters

SABC programming quality must be improved. The majority of the SABC's budget must be allocated to programming. SABC commissioning must be streamlined to develop a set of consistent, fair and just criteria. Further, programming must be made more accountable to audiences through new accountability mechanisms (e.g. programming committees). Community broadcaster programming must be rooted in and accountable to the needs of geographical communities and communities of interest.

7. Options for a new legal structure for the SABC

Given the SABC's critical role in ensuring a free flow of information in our society, the SABC must be reconstituted as a Chapter 9 Constitutional body.

8. Public participation mechanisms for the SABC

New public participation mechanisms must be investigated including the launching of a Public Editor and National and Regional Public Stakeholder Committees.

9. SABC governance and oversight structures

The roles and responsibilities of the SABC's oversight and governance structures must be clarified to ensure that the Ministry and Department confine themselves to their policy making role; Parliament plays its legislative and oversight roles in terms of the SABC's corporate plans and finances; the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) is strengthened and resourced to play its monitoring and regulatory role as regards public programming; the SABC Board is strengthened to play its strategic governance role including the employment of professional staff and, finally, SABC management is empowered to manage the institution without influence from vested interests.

10. Public service broadcasting funding – SABC and community broadcasters

Parliament and the Ministry and Department of Communications must ensure that the SABC has sufficient public funding to pursue its public service mandate in respect of programming so that editorial independence is safeguarded. Any policy and legislation developed on a funding model must ensure the long term independence, sustainability and effectiveness of public broadcasting. An economic modelling exercise is required to ascertain the actual funding requirements of the SABC in terms of the fulfilling of its public mandate in the digital multi-channel environment. Government must investigate new funding models for the community media sector including ways to mitigate against unsustainably high transmission costs.

**WE NEED A STRONG CIVIL SOCIETY VOICE IN SUPPORT OF
PUBLIC BROADCASTING!**