

DIGITAL RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION SERIES 9

DIGITAL MIGRATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

IMPACT ON MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA

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This paper discusses digital broadcasting migration and its advantages, especially regarding marginalised communities in the southern African region. It then defines 'marginalised' communities in the Southern African context.



This is followed by a discussion about whether these communities, which hitherto were voiceless, finally have a voice with the opening up of the airwaves through digital migration and whether this has given them access to information and the airwaves.



What are the challenges these marginalised communities face? Is there political will to include marginalised communities by giving them access to the airwaves? Do they have a voice? Can marginalised communities freely access the airwaves now that the region has migrated to digital?

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA	3
3. MAKING WAVES ON THE AIRWAVES	5
4. CONCLUSION	8

1

INTRODUCTION

What is digital broadcast migration? Simply put, digital migration is the process in which traditional analogue broadcasting services are replaced with digital networks. It is the transition or switch from analogue broadcasting to digital broadcasting.

There are many reasons which make the switch necessary. For example, analogue is costly, has limited frequency spectrums, and is inefficient compared with the new digital technology.

Digital opens up new vistas and possibilities. Terrestrial digital television allows for an increase in the programmes available, improves quality and accessibility, and creates new media services. Digital radio offers improved sound and reception and new multimedia functions. For instance, receivers can be equipped with screens to broadcast images and texts (programme or song titles, etc.).¹

Digital is also more cost-effective and offers limitless frequencies across all broadcasting spectrums, allowing a wider range of citizens and interest groups access to broadcasting frequencies. It gives broadcasters and content creators a wider choice of frequencies, which means more players can enter the market. It gives the voiceless a voice, enhancing and strengthening access to information and human rights. Arguably the most important benefit of this digital migration is providing access to information in a language of one's choice.

Ideally, this development should usher in a new era for marginalised communities, where communities set their own development agendas to disseminate and access information in languages of their choice. But has digital migration opened up the airwaves for the most marginalised?

1. Guyberger.ru.ac.za 'Challenges and perspectives of digital migration for African media 2010

2

MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The majority of the people of Southern Africa live in rural areas. Malawi has the highest rural population at 84%, followed by Eswatini at 76%, Lesotho at 71%, to the lowest, Botswana at 28% and South Africa at 32%.²

Traditionally, rural communities have always been amongst the most marginalised and vulnerable due to a lack of infrastructure and development, limited access to services and facilities, etc.

As in the rest of Africa, colonial borders cut swathes across homogeneous cultural and linguistic groups in Southern Africa, so much so that former colonies, now independent countries, have several different ethnic groups or tribes within their national borders. These ethnic groups or tribes all have distinct languages and cultures. Some tribes are more dominant, while others, especially those located in predominantly rural areas, remain marginalised and on the fringes.

A case in point is the San people. They are the direct descendants of the First Peoples of Southern Africa and today are commonly thought to live only in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. However, the San are also found in Zimbabwe, Angola and Zambia, which makes them the most widely spread group in the region. Most San live in poverty and marginalisation situations³ and typically have limited access to formal education.

Other marginalised groups include the OvaHimba and OvaZemba in southern Angola and north-west Namibia, the Maasai and Hadza hunter-gatherers in Tanzania and the Mbuti, Baka and Batwa peoples (the Indigenous Pygmy People) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

There are also the marginalised urban communities – the shack dwellers – who make up a large number in South Africa (26% of the population),⁴ Namibia (995,000 people or 40% of the total population),⁵ Zimbabwe (1.25 million),⁶ Zambia (70% of the urban population are slum dwellers).⁷ DRC's 5.5 million internally displaced people, primarily women and children, are presumed to be living in informal settlements.⁸

Within these rural and urban marginalised groups are women, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, who all face additional discrimination and marginalisation. People with disabilities, in particular, face a harsher kind of discrimination and marginalisation, including lack of facilities, denied education, and living on the fringes.

VOICES OF WOMEN

Traditionally, women and the girl child face more marginalisation and discrimination than men because of gender stereotypes and socialisation. This is true in both rural and urban areas. High numbers of children, women and the elderly populate many rural areas.⁹

According to UNESCO's On Air with Rural Women:

"Women are twice as likely as men to be illiterate, and rural women are especially at risk. Globally, only 39% of rural girls attend secondary school, and they often suffer from lower levels of civic integration and access to information, as well as exclusion from decision-making circles. These conditions can create a cycle that compromises the ability to participate in public life and raise their concerns in democratic debate."¹⁰

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2. World Bank 2021
 3. lpacc.org.za
 4. Data.worldbank.org 2018
 5. Shack-Dwellers Federation of Namibia Heinrich Amushila, 2019
 6. Development and Cooperation, candc.eu Jeffrey Moyo 'Stranded in the slums' 2020
 7. Sdinet.org 2019
 8. reliefweb.int 2020 'DRC: Internally displaced people and returnees'
 9. Climatescorecard.org 2020
 10. UNESCO 'On air with rural women' 2019

For example, in Zambia:

“Zambian women also face discrimination in employment and land ownership. A 2011 survey reported that 60% of women aged 15-49 had jobs compared to nearly 100% of men. Many of the employed women reported that their positions were unpaid. Furthermore, women with paid employment typically earned less than their male counterparts.”¹¹

There are many such examples across the region. We cannot talk about marginalised communities, urban or rural, without turning the spotlight on women and the continued discrimination they face.

Apart from countries such as Uganda, where especially marginalised women are setting their own agenda through content creation, the examples in the region are few and far between.

LGBTIQ+

The LGBTIQ+ community is another marginalised group in the region that is, by and large, still a taboo in Africa.

In Europe, same-sex sexual activity has been legalised across the continent, and more than half of European countries have legalised same-sex marriage or civil unions. The picture is very different in Africa, where 25 out of 54 countries continue to outlaw same-sex activity.¹² On the continent, only South Africa has legalised same-sex marriage.

In 2015, 2019 and 2021, Mozambique, Angola and Botswana decriminalised same-sex sexual relationships. They remain, with South Africa, the only southern African countries to have done so.

Furthermore, there is also a growing vocal anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric in the region, fuelled by some church leaders and past and present heads of state. In September 2022, Zambia’s recently elected president, Hakainde Hichilema, reiterated his government does not support LGBTIQ+ and intersex rights.¹³

Zimbabwe’s late president, Robert Mugabe, issued a string of homophobic statements, at one time describing gays as “worse than pigs and dogs” and whose conduct “is condemned by nature”.

Today, discrimination against LGBTIQ+ continues in the country, especially among students. Samuel Matsikure,

programme manager of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), said there is a lot of harassment, stress and anxiety among students at higher learning institutions that often follows them to the workplace after completing their studies. In some cases, former students were dismissed from the workplace because of their sexual orientation. Matsikure said some students are disowned by families who stop paying their fees after discovering their sexual orientation.¹⁴

Namibia’s founding president, Sam Nujoma, told university students in March 2001, “The Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality, lesbianism here. Police are ordered to arrest you, deport you and imprison you too.”¹⁵

Only in a handful of southern African countries – South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho and Namibia – did most of the population display high tolerance for gay people.¹⁶

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

This group faces marginalisation even within marginalised groups.

‘People with disabilities are more likely to experience poorer health, fewer economic opportunities, and higher poverty than people without disabilities’.¹⁷

Most Zambians with disabilities live in poverty and generally have much lower literacy levels than persons without disabilities. Disabled persons often resort to begging as a means of survival.¹⁸

In Namibia, disability continues to be addressed with a charity approach rather than a human rights approach,¹⁹ clearly showing that disability is not mainstreamed.

A South African Human Rights Commission report in 2016 found that people with disabilities continue to lack access to adequate health and basic education and are at risk of economic isolation with no prospect of securing employment. The sector is also particularly vulnerable to the compounded effects of discrimination and abuse.²⁰

In the DRC, due to deeply-ingrained cultural beliefs regarding disability, persons with disabilities are systemically discriminated against and are often victims of violence and neglect. Many persons with disabilities are accused of witchcraft and are subjected to exorcisms and torture. Women and children in the DRC are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Persons with disabilities face educational and employment barriers, with

11. Borgenproject.org “Organisations working for women’s right in Zambia”.

12. Human Rights Watch

13. Lusakatimes.com October 2022

14. Universityworldnews.com April 2021

15. Iol.co.za March 2001

16. Afro Barometer 2016

17. PA Development Disability Council paddc.org 2019

18. International Labour Organisation ‘Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Zambia’ 2011

19. Namibia – UNFPA.org ‘Human a rights approach needed to mainstream disability in Namibia’, May 2018

20. Sahr.org.co.za ‘Disability’ 2016

90% of persons with disabilities illiterate, 93% unemployed, and 96% living in poverty.²¹

The situation is much the same in many countries in the region.

Where and how are the voices of these different marginalised groups heard on the airwaves, if at all? Has digital migration empowered them at all?

These groups, severally and separately, constitute the most glaring marginalised groups in Southern Africa, and their voices desperately need to be heard...and loudly.

3

MAKING WAVES ON THE AIRWAVES

With much of Southern Africa having migrated to digital broadcasting, the airwaves have opened up, with more radio frequencies now available. This has given rise to alternative commercial and community radio stations where listeners can receive information in their own languages and have a say in the content.

But do these marginalised groups have access to the airwaves in a sustained, structured manner where they create content best suited to their needs? If they are featured on a given radio station as guests, do they have a say in the content?

In a region where the population is mainly rural, radio is the most popular, affordable and easily accessible medium of information. Digital migration affords marginalised rural communities the unique opportunity to access the airwaves because lack of frequencies is no longer an excuse. This means that marginalised communities can now create their own content and freely access information in their own language.

The inclusion of women's voices in radio can contribute to progress on gender, social, health and other development issues in some of the most isolated communities in the region. Women, particularly rural women, still have to break that glass ceiling and set up their own radio stations. However, some communities of women have taken small first steps in having their voices heard.

Studies show that women account for nearly half of the world's smallholder farmers and produce 70% of Africa's food. According to research, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase the yields

of farms by 20%-30% and reduce hunger by up to 17%. In addition, women plough profits back into their households, therefore alleviating poverty from the bottom up.²²

As farmers, foresters and providers, women have a unique understanding of the ecosystems they live alongside. In Malawi, a pioneering radio programme is tapping into this immense body of knowledge through a platform for women to engage in landscape restoration. Two stations in Malawi's Michinga and Mangochi districts provide segments for local women farmers to discuss issues of concern. Groups then listen to the programmes and provide feedback. These are known as Radio Listeners' Clubs. Currently, more than 40 such listening clubs target over 200,000 women in the districts.²³

Radio Listeners' Clubs, also known as Development Through Radio (DTR), was first introduced by the late Jennifer Sibanda, the Executive Director of the Federation of African Women-SADC (FAMW-SADC) in Zimbabwe in the late 90s. The DTR project sought to empower the marginalised rural woman by giving them access to and through the radio.²⁴ The DTR trained groups of rural women to produce their own radio programmes, which would then be broadcast on national radio at a time when women could gather around the radio and listen to the programme. The listeners' clubs would also be given free recording equipment and radio sets.

The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) replicated the project in Namibia. Unfortunately, in both Zimbabwe and Namibia, the DTR projects ceased operations despite their popularity.

21. PA Development Disability Council. paddc.org 2019

22. World Economic Forum weforum.org March 2018 'Gender Inequality' Food and Agricultural Organisation, fao.org 'Closing the gender gap in agriculture' March 2011

23. iucn.org Amplifying women's voices through radio in Malawi

24. FAO.org

Rosa Namises, co-founder of Women Solidarity Namibia, which represents women in marginalised rural communities, says these communities often don't receive radio signals, let alone have their voices heard. Some San communities in remote areas sit under trees with wires on their radio for better reception. Their voices are rarely heard on the radio, and coverage of their issues is sporadic and only when a government official visits the area or an unusual event occurs. Namises says information about these communities is spread by secondary messengers such as advocacy groups, tourists who take photos and do write-ups, and occasionally by elected officials.²⁵

Without a platform for their voices, community radio becomes an essential conduit for specialised content production by women and for women in rural communities.

*"As community radio is all about voicing local concerns and hearing local voices, it can play a crucial role in setting the agenda for participatory local governance. One doesn't have to be literate to either set up a radio station or create content that connects with the people. What is essential is passion and commitment." Rajiv Tikoo, Director, OneWorld Foundation India, a non-profit that facilitates policy-making and setting up community radio stations.*²⁶

In the Namibian rural town of Outjo, a community radio station owned and operated by women uses desktop technology to broadcast to the Damara-speaking community. Rural women in farming projects would benefit from listeners' clubs as they could share skills with other women.²⁷

The Nkhotakota community radio in Malawi is credited with giving women in their community the opportunity to define their development needs and find solutions. This was achieved by creating a segment where local women were invited to the studio to discuss topics that affect them. At the end of the show, solutions were suggested to the issues discussed.²⁸

The radio ownership issue also becomes a problem for rural women, who are the poorest of the poor. In rural Mozambique, most radio sets are owned by men, meaning that women can often only listen to the radio with their husbands' explicit or implicit permission.²⁹

"Often, programmes about women have to be channelled through male listeners, so even in programmes about women's health, for example,

the reporter has to say something like 'please make sure to tell your wife about this', and this dynamic is something we are working to change." (Joao Bosse, h2n national coordinator for radio).

Radio Fot addressed this problem by distributing over 2000 solar-powered radio sets to remote communities in Niassa province of Mozambique.

As a means for marginalised communities to access information and produce relevant content, community radio remains uncertain in Eswatini. The country currently has no legal framework governing community radio stations. A vibrant community radio in the kingdom, Lubombo Community Radio, has been applying for a broadcasting license since 1998, but after 22 years still has not received one.³⁰ Despite this, the radio station is boldly producing content for women and by women in their community. One such programme, 'Women and Youth, Drivers of Change Project', has been very popular, giving women a voice for the first time.

South Africa, by far, has the most radio stations where women have a say in the station's running and, crucially, in content production. A case in point is WOMan Radio, a digital radio station founded by singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka in 2019 and started broadcasting in October 2020. It prides itself on being a station 'for women, by women, with women'.³¹ However, a random sampling of its programmes, producers and content, from music to topics, reveals that this is a radio station aimed solely at the empowered urban woman. It does not begin to speak to even the marginalised urban woman.

As the singer herself eloquently puts it:

*"We chose to be online so we could reach people from across the world. We have listeners who engage with us in California, Kenya, New York, London, Minneapolis, Nigeria, Tanzania all in conversation and it's a matter of downloading an App and tuning in."*³²

Practically, this is out of the reach of the most marginalised women – rural women – who are in the majority.

Womanity, a weekly talk radio show, is another example of the exclusion of rural and marginalised urban women. The show is produced and presented by Dr Amaleya Goneos-Malka. A line-up of past episodes shows a stellar cast of prominent African women, from sitting vice presidents, ministers, and MPs to former presidents and beauty queens.³³ The talk

25. Rosa Namises Women Solidarity Namibia November 2022

26. Thebetterindia.com

27. Rosa Namises Women Solidarity Namibia, November 2022

28. BBC News – Africa

29. h2n.org.mz 2021

30. International Federation of Journalists – if.org 2020

31. Womanr.co.za 2022

32. News24.co.za 2020

show is broadcast on several radio stations with a significant share of the listener market in South Africa, including on the national South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Unfortunately, neither the voices of marginalised urban women nor their rural counterparts are present.

Radio Bangu in the DRC is an exception to this general rule – its programmes are dedicated to empowering women, and it receives strong local support. The broadcasts have been so well received that the women have created listeners' clubs. Another positive example is Zanzibar (Tanzania) Radio Tumbatu FM, which has brought the previously taboo topic of gender-based violence and the authorities' role under the spotlight. As a direct result of the awareness programmes on the station, the police have established gender desks at local police stations.

UNESCO's Empowering Local Radio with ICTs project aims to provide marginalised populations, particularly in remote and poor areas, with reliable and quality access to information on topics that affect their lives.³⁴

Generally speaking, marginalised women do not have a voice. This begs the question: why?

Rosa Namises of Women Solidarity Namibia says the problem is that these communities are uninformed and have no knowledge of how to set up a community radio to benefit them. Resources also pose a problem for these rural communities.

By far, the most marginalised groups of both men and women are the San communities. The Kwedam-speaking San community in Namibia's Western Zambezi region have started an online-based radio station to preserve their language and cultural values. The volunteers are proud to be part of this initiative, which it believes will improve their livelihoods.³⁵

To date, the NBC's **!Ah** radio station is the **only broadcaster** in the region to produce and air programmes in San languages. The station broadcasts out of Tsumkwe, in eastern Namibia, a traditionally San area. However, content on the station is produced by NBC producers, albeit from the various San groups. The community itself does not contribute to or have control over the content.

In the DRC, the newly-elected president has pledged to guarantee the enjoyment of the Indigenous Pygmy People's fundamental rights and the promotion of their traditional culture and knowledge.³⁶ The best manner to achieve this goal

for these communities is through radio. Indigenous Peoples in Southern Africa can preserve their traditional knowledge and practices and pass these on to the younger generation through appropriate content on the radio. However, with indigenous peoples' existence threatened, advocacy groups are putting all their efforts into ensuring the rights of indigenous peoples are entrenched. Very little attention is given to how best to harness the vast opportunities opened by digital broadcasting migration.

The LGBTIQ community throughout Southern Africa face even more of an uphill battle to have their voices heard, dealing, as it were, with homophobic prejudices and stereotypes.

In Lesotho, an LGBTIQ advocacy group, the People's Matrix Association, says their community is invited on the radio only on special occasions, such as gay pride or some such week. It says it has long dreamed of owning or managing its own radio station.

*'Having our own radio station would give our community a voice and go a long way in changing perceptions about our community, however, lack of financial resources have prevented us from pursuing this option.'*³⁷

This sentiment is echoed by a Zambian activist: 'People must have accurate information on who we are as people and begin to see us as human beings'.³⁸

In Namibia, Wendelinus Hamutenya, the director of the LGBTIQ advocacy group Rights for All Movement (RAM), says they have tried to apply for a license but have been hamstrung by bureaucracy, further exacerbated by financial resources and lack of training in content production.³⁹ Much like in Lesotho and South Africa, LGBTIQ+ rights groups in Namibia are only invited as guests on radio and television when there is an event, such as Mr Gay Namibia, an interview featured on national broadcaster NBC.⁴⁰

Generally, "a majority of stories analysed about LGBTIQ+ issues fail to incorporate the voices of those affected. In addition, many stories use only secondary sources – or no sources – and feature discriminatory or stereotypical language".⁴¹

Digital broadcasting migration and access to information have had little to no positive impact on marginalised communities in the region. The right to access information on issues that affect them is one right these communities still have to demand.

33. Womanity Africa.co.za

34. UNESCO en.unesco.org

35. The Namibian, September 2021

36. Iwgia.org (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2021)

37. <https://thematrix.org.ls>

38. Mino, LGBTIQ activist, Zambia. September 2022

39. Wendelinus Hamutenya, RAM October 2022

40. NBC television, September 2022

41. Gender Links

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CONCLUSION

In a region where communities live in far-flung remote areas, radio becomes a necessary tool for information and communication in their own language and listening to content relevant to their education and development. This can only be achieved if these communities have access to their own radio stations, where they will produce their own content.

But as previously mentioned, these communities do not have the information on how to set up a radio station, including the legal ramifications thereof. Sourcing funding is another area where local advocacy groups see a significant obstacle. Even if they source the funding, a lack of content production or management skills is another challenge.

Portable suitcase radios have been used effectively by several communities of rural women. The suitcase radio comprises a complete broadcasting unit and can also be used as a production studio.

On the Pacific island of Fiji, what started as a mobile “suitcase” community radio, with young women volunteers

conducting monthly broadcasts, is now a 24-hour station, FemTALK 89FM, the Pacific’s first women-led community radio network, which reaches some of the most densely-populated areas of Fiji.⁴² This simple technology has also been used in Mali’s historic Timbuktu to broadcast world heritage programmes using information from the internet.⁴³ There’s no reason why suitcase radio cannot be introduced in the region.

Training is another critical area that must go in tandem with setting up community radio stations.

However, it must be emphasised that access to information is a basic human right, and advocacy activism must be strengthened in those countries where a lack of a conducive environment stifles these rights, Eswatini being a case in point.

42. www.ignite.globalfundforwomen.org

43. Comminit.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norah Appolus is an award-winning veteran journalist and broadcaster. She has worked for various broadcasters around the world: Radio-Television Algerie (RTA) Algeria; Radio France International (RFI) France; and Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Namibia. She is also a stringer for British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and RFI.

Her notable achievements include leading the team that trained and launched TV Malawi in 1999. She also successfully introduced the Development Through Radio concept to rural women in Namibia.

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fesmedia Africa is the regional media project of the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Africa. Its work promotes a free, open, liberal and democratic media landscape that enables ordinary citizens to actively influence and improve their lives, as well as those of the communities and societies they live in. *fesmedia* Africa believes that in order to participate in public life and decision-making, people need to have the means, skills and

opportunities to access, exchange and use information and knowledge. They need to be able to communicate and exchange ideas, opinions, data, facts and figures about issues that affect them and their communities.

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