

# FUTURE PROOFING COMMUNITY RADIO WORKSHOPS – WHAT I LEARNT ABOUT RADIO IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), in partnership with NEMISA (National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa) and the MDDA (Media Development & Diversity Agency) hosted two three-day workshops in Johannesburg and Cape Town, respectively, in March 2022. Delegates from some 150 community radio stations attended the future proofing workshops, eager to learn about digital literacy, how communities can be assisted to embrace the digital age, digital disruption and understanding other new developments, including in the policy environment. Overall, the aim was to foster partnerships, networking and shared learning through participatory, interactive and robust engagement.

As a young person, I took this opportunity to learn, engage and enhance my awareness of the significant role played by community radio broadcasters in South Africa. I learned that community radio stations serve the needs and interest of our communities - they are the eyes and ears of communities. As Doc Fick, NEMISA's Head of Training, said, "Community Radio was set up for communities to communicate within themselves". He also highlighted that, "the purpose of a three-tier system is to ensure both pluralism and diversity; pluralism refers to the number of broadcast outlets, diversity to the type of voices in broadcasting".

The workshop highlighted that community radio is the largest producer of radio content and is indeed a companion. "The power of radio as a companion can never be understated," said Nadia Bulbulia, NAB's Executive Director. As a young person always on the move, I was pleased to learn that community radio is moving onto digital platforms. This means that I can listen to my favourite community radio station just about anywhere, at any time, using my digital devices and still feel the companionship.

It was also exciting to learn that stations, by harnessing new digital technologies and new platforms, can strengthen dialogue and debate and transform themselves into audio and audiovisual content providers.

Paul McNally, co-founder and CEO of Volume Africa, gave insights on practical approaches to providing powerful narratives and storytelling through podcasting. His colleague, Roland Perold, co-founder and COO of Volume Africa also emphasized that community radio need to embrace podcasting and make it part of their toolkit. I personally spend much of my time on my phone, often listening to podcasts produced by the commercial broadcasters. In the same way, I would welcome community radio stations to use podcasting to considerably extend their reach and offer greater accessibility and engagement.

Andrew Pike, representing the NAB and SADIBA (South African Digital Broadcasting Association) gave insights on digital radio technologies and internet streaming and the South African status with regards to these developments. He emphasized the need for the radio industry to keep expanding and stay relevant in the digital age. DAB+, the most widely adopted digital radio standard worldwide, has been adopted in most countries in the EU, with ICASA planning its introduction for South Africa. He however noted that FM will remain the primary radio technology for the foreseeable future.

The future proofing workshops also emphasized the importance of compliance and community ownership. Julia Sham, NAB's Head of Legal and Regulatory Affairs. She emphasized that "Ownership of

the community broadcasting licensee must remain with the community served. Community members must be involved in the management of the community broadcasting licensee”. She further explained the application process in terms of a compliance perspective, ongoing compliance requirements once a license is granted and the new regulations issued in 2019, which every community broadcaster must familiarize themselves with.

As one of the ‘social media’ generation, it was useful to learn about how to maintain a safe digital space from Murray Hunter, Senior Associate ALT Advisory, who gave insights about privacy, digital security and cyber security and the implications of the POPIA Act for community broadcasters. The increasingly widespread use of social media has led to cyber bullying and stalking, especially on platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

More than anything, this was an amazing learning curve for me, as a young person living through the fourth industrial revolution. In answer to Shoeshoe Qhu, VOW FM Station Manager, who asked the delegates what they were doing to introduce digital technologies into their communities, the workshop encouraged me to teach elderly people in my community about the benefits of technology innovations, and how digital technologies make our lives easier. This was repeated by Natano Brache, SABC Radio’s Head of Programming and Innovation, who encouraged us to introduce these technologies to elderly people by helping them install apps such as Whatsapp to enhance their communications and help them embrace the digital age.

Speaking on the potential, pitfalls, and realities, as well as the implications of the 4IR for community radio, Natano Brache also stressed that “radio needs to be on top of its game in order to last in South Africa”. However, what I learnt overall from the workshop, is that, as Adv Dimakatso Qocha, ICASA Council member, said, “Gone are those days when digital was regarded as a disruptor, radio is here to stay”.



*Nadia Bulbulia, NAB Executive Director, (left) with Adv Dimakatso Qocha, ICASA Council member, enjoying the Cape Town workshop.*



*Doc Fick, NEMISA’s Head of Training, explaining the framework for creating content.*



*Consultant Jayshree Pather (left) and Khutso Tsikane, MDDA's Digital Co-ordinator, setting the scene the Cape Town workshop programme.*



*Shoeshoe Qhu, VOW FM Station Manager, asking delegates how they were introducing digital technologies into their communities.*



*Molebogeng Leshabane, Nemisa Chairperson, welcoming the delegates at the future proofing community radio workshops in Cape Town.*



*Trevor Rammitlwa, CEO of NEMISA, presenting the digital skills and creative media.*



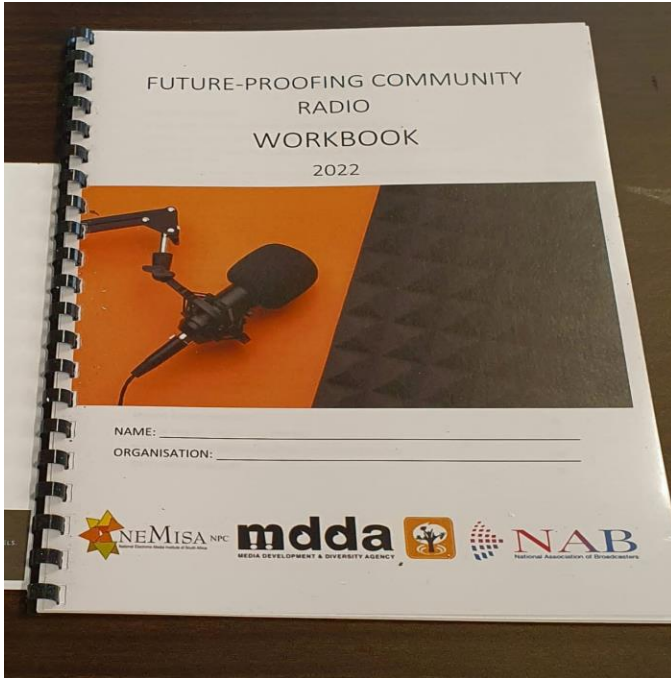
*Andrew Pike from SADIBA giving insights on digital radio technologies and internet streaming*



*Julia Sham- Guild from the NAB taking the delegates through key compliance matters.*



*Delegates attending the future proofing workshop in Johannesburg.*



*Future Proofing Community Radio Workbook*



*Roland Perold from Volume Africa presenting practical approaches to powerful narratives and storytelling through podcasting.*