

# UNIVERSAL SERVICE ACCESS

## INTRODUCTION

Historically the concepts of "universal access" and "universal service" have been applied to the telecommunications sector, where universal service obligations were set for operators following deregulation and market liberalisation. The aim of these obligations (usually contained in licence conditions) has been to ensure that general public policy goals, including those of economic growth and social development, could be attained in the context of competing demands for scarce resources, as countries privatise former monopolistic providers of basic or essential services. In the context of convergence, these concepts have sometimes been transplanted crudely into the broadcasting sector in an effort to ensure that deregulation and market liberalisation do not lead to a situation where people are deprived of access to essential services.

Application of the concepts of Universal Service and Access in the broadcasting sector is based on a different premiss from that of telecommunications. The 1998 White Paper on Broadcasting Policy said that the key goals of broadcasting policy were to ensure that policy intervention would redress past imbalances and "recognise the special character of language broadcasting and provide for technical parameters that suit the different languages". In terms of the Broadcasting Act, the SABC has to work towards making its services available throughout South Africa. Also, national policy is expected to "prioritise the provision of services in languages of choice where applicable". What the White Paper recognises is that "programming alone will not solve the problems of addressing all South African broadcasting needs. Access is a critical area that needs urgent address through appropriate policy intervention. In the area of signal distribution, the network and infrastructure must be extended to cover the entire country".

This document sets out a policy on Universal Service and Access for the SABC's broadcasting services. It aims to facilitate the provision of a comprehensive end-to-end public broadcasting service for all South Africans.


Since there is no definition of Universal Service and Access for broadcasting, this policy includes a definition of Broadcasting Universal Service and Access.

As a major player in the emerging knowledge-based economy and the global information society, the SABC has a crucial part to play in defining targets for achieving Broadcasting Universal Service and Access in South Africa, and indeed beyond our borders. This policy sets out general principles to guide planning and implementation of the SABC's operations. The aim is ultimately to develop a corporate action plan, with steps that could be achieved within specified periods, and is aligned with other SABC plans and policies.

## CONTEXT OF THIS POLICY

The changes in the broadcasting industry, including technological changes, make it imperative for this policy to be flexible and dynamic. The aim is to ensure that uncertainty about future developments in the South African broadcasting sector do not discourage much needed future investment in the sector, nor hamper planning efforts to expand coverage and services.

What is certain for medium- to long-term planning, is that future recommendations and targets for Universal Service and Access will undoubtedly be made in the context of convergence. We may assume, then, that when questions of universal coverage in terms of signal distribution are raised, the means of transmission will be assessed so that the most technically appropriate and affordable solutions are adopted.



Legislation, regulations and public policy directives in the South African communications sector are already framed in the language of technological convergence, in which the general approach to regulation is based on a three-tier structure: networks, services and content. Regulatory developments in the highly industrialised regions of the world have already adapted to the needs of addressing convergence. They have also relied heavily on competition law to regulate transmission networks and trade in audiovisual products and services. Separate policies and regulations have been developed to deal with the goals of cultural and social policy, including extension of public broadcasting services.

From a technological point of view, the developments in digital broadcasting technology will certainly help to shape this policy. Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) have not only revolutionised the transmission of radio and television signals, but introduced innovations such as digital modulation techniques, wireless data transmission to mobile receivers, and frequency efficiency. Within this, a central concern is the extent to which the cost of digital receivers will become affordable over time. The main advantage of digital broadcasting, compared with analogue terrestrial broadcasting, is that a number of radio and television services are combined into a single digital data stream that is distributed to every transmitter in the network, making it possible to transmit several programmes in the space previously occupied by one service.

From the point of view of universal service, the key question is whether these advances in digital technology will help us to deliver affordable public broadcasting services, or merely add to the inequality in provision of services and widen the digital divide.

The policy and regulations that will determine future definitions of Universal Service and Access in South Africa in a fully digital broadcasting environment will almost certainly be instituted after an appreciable time. Those concepts, then, will have to evolve over time and in response to technological advances, market developments and changes in user demand.

On a broader scale, the government's e-strategy has yet to be finalised. The requirements of this strategy to achieve Universal Service and Access, as well as other initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide and inducting South Africa into the Information Society, will determine the macro policy environment in which the SABC's policy will be developed and refined further.

The SABC's policy has been developed with these factors in mind, to ensure that it remains flexible, dynamic and responsive to such developments while providing direction and certainty for the SABC's operations.

## SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The SABC's commitment to Universal Service and Access extends across its portfolio of radio stations and television channels. Implementation of this policy will prioritise the gradual extension of public broadcasting services to everyone in the country.

## BACKGROUND

Plans for future coverage will be built on what the SABC has already achieved in working towards Universal Service and Access. Those achievements are summarised below:

**Since 1999, the SABC has extended the reach of its television services through these projects:**

- Elimination of the SABC2-SABC3 switch in parts of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal increased the reach of SABC3 to 74.3% of the population
- Expansion of SABC2 to Taung and Ganyesa
- Expansion of SABC3 in high-density metropolitan areas.

Most of these projects are the result of many years of planning and implementation since the SABC's universal service goals were set in the mid-1990's, based on the Independent Broadcasting Authority's Triple Inquiry Report. The operation has involved complex, time-consuming, network and coverage planning, in conjunction with signal distribution provider Sentech. In fact the process of expanding coverage, firstly of the SABC's African Language Stations, which began in 1995, was implemented only from 1998. That gives some idea of the time it takes to plan and

implement effectively. It should be noted, though, that the process is also slowed by long delays in getting approval from local authorities and conducting environmental impact assessments before new transmitter sites can be established.

**In 1999, coverage of the SABC television services was as follows:**

- SABC1 - 82.81%
- SABC2 - 85.46%
- SABC3 - 71.86%

**In 2003 the SABC was expanding its networks, after which the coverage will be:**

- SABC1 - 89%
- SABC2 - 91%
- SABC3 - 77%

For radio, the Independent Broadcasting Authority recommended in 1995, as part of its Triple Inquiry Report, that the 11 full-spectrum language services be upgraded to reach more speakers of their broadcasting languages. The SABC took up the challenge and made formal application to the Independent Broadcasting Authority for authorisation to expand the transmitter networks of those stations. The plans were approved on 19 May 1999, to be implemented in two phases.

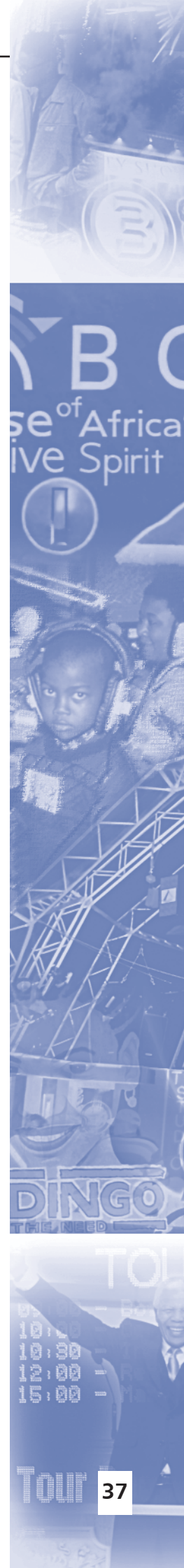
The SABC moved quickly and phase 1, involving erecting additional transmitters at existing sites, was completed by 1 June 1999. This took radio to 1,2 million people who had not previously received a radio signal in their own language. Four radio stations benefited from this phase: Sesotho broadcaster Lesedi FM gained 300 780 potential listeners, Ukhozi FM (in isiZulu) gained 128 200, Ikwewezi FM (in isiNdebele) gained 86 318, and Ligwalagwala FM (in siSwati) gained 128 200.

The goal of phase 2 was to take an FM radio signal to areas that had not had access to one. This involved setting up 11 new transmitter sites housing 13 FM transmitters. The work began in March 2001 and by end 2003 has provided 2,1 million more potential listeners with FM radio. By the time it is completed, 3,5 million people will be able to tune in. In all, the two-phase plan will expand the FM network to reach 4 789 872 more people. Table 1 shows the percentage increase in the reach for all 11 radio stations.

SERVICE	BEFORE EXPANSION (AFTER INTEGRATION)	CURRENTLY* (as of October '03)	GAIN
Ikwewezi FM	30%	67%	37%
Lesedi FM	73%	85%	13%
Ligwalagwala FM	34%	71%	37%
Motsweding FM	86%	86%	N/A
Munghana Lonene FM	84%	84%	N/A
Phalaphala FM	79%	79%	N/A
RSG	87%	87%	N/A
SAfm	95%	95%	N/A
Thobela FM	73%	78%	5%
Ukhozi FM	69%	81%	12%
Umhlobo Wenene FM	79%	79%	N/A

**Table 1:** Coverage percentages for PBS radio. These figures include three transmitters approved by ICASA but not yet in operation. After integration refers to the integration of former TBVC broadcasters as follows: Radio Thoyandou into Phalaphala FM, Radio Mmbatho into Motsweding FM and Radio Transkei into Umhlobo Wenene FM.

In addition to terrestrial expansion, the SABC radio and television services are also available throughout South Africa on the Vivid DTH satellite platform.



## A DEFINITION OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS FOR BROADCASTING SERVICES

The SABC understands Broadcasting Universal Service and Access to mean:

"Provision of a range of audio and video broadcasting services to citizens throughout the Republic. The services shall include, but are not limited to, radio and television programmes that cater for information, cultural, religious and educational needs and are delivered via the most appropriate technical means available at an affordable price to broadcasters and audiences alike."

### AIMS FOR BROADCASTING UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS

The Triple Inquiry Report drew a distinction between universal service obligations for radio and for television, and mandated the SABC to attend urgently to the problem of limited coverage and poor quality of the African language services, primarily through radio. The SABC's approach is that this distinction is still valid, and that using radio to extend unilingual programming in order to achieve Broadcasting Universal Service and Access should be retained as a policy goal in future. This principle should be extended gradually to television as the technical and financial means become available.

However, in implementing this policy the SABC does not mean to replicate apartheid's social and geographical segregation patterns. There is no intention to segregate the airwaves by simply maintaining the current provision of language-based services targeted only at those areas where most of the speakers of a language traditionally reside. This means that in implementing the policy we should not assume speakers of any of South Africa's official languages who still reside in the former homelands would choose to remain there, or would not commute. In fact, the current urbanisation trends demonstrate shifts in the demographic profile of people living in various parts of the country, and confirm the movement of people from rural to urban environments in search of improved economic prospects.

In this context, the SABC's planning for expansion of coverage takes account of relevant demographic data and urbanisation trends.

The SABC also has to consider how to prioritise allocation of resources to extend coverage of the full range of public broadcasting services when, for instance, a huge investment in infrastructure results in reaching only a very few people, or provides a social but not a financial return. In each case, the extent of the proposed coverage, the number of people to be reached by the expansion, the extent of need of those people, the cost of the expansion, the nature of the service to be provided by the expansion, and frequency availability, among other things, will determine the feasibility of investing in transmission extension. Against this backdrop, the SABC's aims for Broadcasting Universal Service and Access are as follows:

- The SABC's first aim is to endeavour to ensure that every South African has access to a broadcasting service
- Another aim is to ensure that a radio service that provides a range of programmes, is available in each official language. Initially, this will be achieved by using the most affordable means of signal distribution to reach at least 80% of the speakers of each language
- As a more long-term goal, the SABC undertakes to ensure that audiences have access to a range of radio services in a variety of official languages
- As to television, the SABC aims to ensure that at least two public service channels, offering a range of programming in a variety of official languages, are available. Initially, this would be achieved by using the most affordable means of signal distribution to reach at least 90% of the population.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR ACHIEVING BROADCASTING UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS**

In achieving these aims, the SABC is guided by the principles set out below.

### **Achieving Broadcasting Universal Service and Access is the responsibility of the South African broadcasting system as a whole.**

The principle established in national policy, legislation and regulations is that achieving Universal Service and Access is not solely the SABC's responsibility. Policy pronouncements have, since the Independent Broadcasting Authority Triple Inquiry Report was released in 1995, and the White Paper on Broadcasting Policy in 1998, affirmed consistently that Universal Service and Access is the responsibility of the South African broadcasting system as a whole. This includes other categories of broadcasting licensees, such as commercial and community broadcasters, as well as signal distributors. In this regard, section 34(2)(b) says: "the signal distribution sector must provide universal access for all South Africans to broadcast services".

The SABC's responsibility is to define its contribution to Broadcasting Universal Service and Access. It therefore makes a regular report of its achievements against its stated aims.

The SABC also liaises regularly with other stakeholders who share the responsibility for extending Broadcasting Universal Service and Access. These are primarily Sentech, ICASA, the Department of Communications and the Universal Service Agency.

### **Achievement of Broadcasting Universal Service and Access is subject to the financial resources available.**

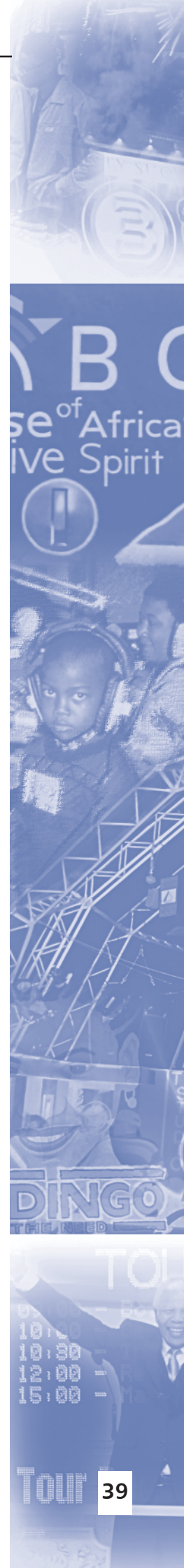
Broadcasting legislation recognises that resources to finance provision of the public broadcasting services are limited. The principle established applies to both public service obligations and achievement of Universal Service and Access. For instance, Section 3(4) of the Broadcasting Act of 1999, provides that "the broadcasting system as a whole must provide educational programming, and where such programming is provided by a dedicated education service, must be extended throughout the Republic within the financial resources". Regarding commercial services, Section 30(d) of the Broadcasting Act of 1999 provides that: "commercial broadcasting services, when viewed collectively, must within a reasonable period of time be extended to all South Africans and provide comprehensive coverage of the areas which they are licensed to serve". Another section of the Broadcasting Act that makes the provision of services conditional on availability of resources is section 3(6), which says: "a range of programming in the Republic's official languages must be extended to all South Africans as circumstances permit".


Likewise, the SABC's approach to achieving Broadcasting Universal Service and Access has to take account of the financial resources available. In this approach, the SABC should strive for economic efficiency while achieving the maximum in terms of service delivery targets. As the SABC migrates from analogue to digital, the financial implications of double illumination will need to be factored into our planning.

The SABC's approach takes cognisance of the approach to national development set out in the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS) and Urban Renewal Programme (URP). Therefore aims have been fixed to guide planning and implementation that is co-ordinated to attain economic efficiency while achieving maximum impact on targets of service delivery. In practice, this would mean, for example, that as roll-out of the electricity grid advanced, detailed planning for expansion of TV coverage could be closely co-ordinated to occur as electricity became available.

### **The interoperability of systems and delivery platforms is the key to achieving Broadcasting Universal Service and Access.**

Optimal solutions for expansion of coverage promised by the advent of digital broadcasting, across any of the delivery platforms (satellite, terrestrial or cable), are technically possible and financially feasible only if the networks and operating systems are interoperable. This is not the case in South Africa at present.





In the short to medium term, the SABC's Broadcasting Universal Service and Access aims are to be achieved by using a combination of analogue and digital technologies. Adoption of a global standard for digital broadcasting throughout South Africa in order to promote interoperability, mobility and end-to-end connectivity, would therefore be the key to advancing the achievement of Broadcasting Universal Service and Access.

## **MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

As the need to achieve Broadcasting Universal Service and Access affects many areas of the SABC, the Board requires management to determine responsibility within the Corporation for driving implementation of this policy.

The Board also requires management to submit an annual action plan for Broadcasting Universal Service and Access, outlining goals and resources required. This would ensure that dynamic changes in the industry did not make plans redundant. It would also allow harnessing of technological developments to assist in attainment of Broadcasting Universal Service and Access. A summary of the previous year's achievements should be attached to this plan, including:

- A report of the SABC's achievements in terms of Broadcasting Universal Service and Access against the stated aims, including reasons for achieving or failing to achieve them
- A breakdown of the services extended in the previous year, including the increase in population coverage of those services and the cost of the expansion.

Relevant aspects of these reports are included in the Corporation's Annual Report to Parliament.

## **REVIEW**

This policy is reviewed by the SABC Board every five years.