

# **Rebuilding Civil Society: Democracy in Deed: Series 1**

## **A Report on Audience Reception**

**prepared for  
ABC Ulwazi**

**by  
Nell and Shapiro cc**

**April 2002**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nell and Shapiro cc did an audience impact/reception assessment of Series 1 of *Re-building Civil Society: Democracy in Deed* at the request of ABC Ulwazi. ABC Ulwazi had produced the series (using a drama format plus expert input) for flighting by community radio stations and had distributed it to 30 stations countrywide. It had subsequently produced a second series and was about to go into production with a third series. The intention was that the audience impact/reception assessment process would feed into Series 3. Stations had also received training in contextualising the series for local conditions. Series 1 was only available in English. Eight focus groups were run with listeners at stations in Gauteng, the Free State and Mpumalanga. The groups included a mixture of rural and urban listeners. Cost and time constraints made it difficult to include other stations.

We found that:

- ◆ The series was generally well received by respondents and stations.
- ◆ The messages and themes were generally well understood and the main message, that successful democracy requires the active participation of an informed citizenry, was generally accepted.
- ◆ The drama format worked well and listeners identified with the characters and the situations, although rural listeners felt the series had an urban focus.
- ◆ Although the topic was considered important and relevant, stations and, to some extent, listeners, would like to be consulted more about the choice of topics for programmes.
- ◆ Attempts by ABC Ulwazi to assist stations in contextualising the programmes for local situations had met with mixed success. Although most stations had made some efforts, the language issue had confounded some. Others (particularly in the Free State) had done their own translations with considerable success.
- ◆ Stations need help in the skills of marketing such programmes to local sponsors and finding local advertisers for them. This may require pre-research into what sponsors and advertisers are likely to support as well as the ability to provide listenership figures and responses.
- ◆ The audience reception assessment process serves a valuable purpose in encouraging listeners to voice opinions about programmes. It might be useful to train stations to do such assessments themselves in order to contain costs which are high for such processes.
- ◆ Innovative and differentiated ways of addressing the language issue are needed. Possibilities might include training stations to make their own “soapies”, using local talent and languages, and more differentiated targeting of programmes.

**Nell and Shapiro cc**  
**April 2002**

## **PREFACE**

The community radio sector is an exciting one in which to work. It is the new frontier of community activism and, as such, it provides great opportunities for interacting with and responding to communities. We believe that ABC Ulwazi is doing relevant and innovative work in this sector, both in production and training. We are grateful for the opportunity to interact, once again, with the organisation and the stations it serves. For us, the interaction is always a sharp learning curve about South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We are delighted that ABC Ulwazi has initiated a drama series with courage and success and look forward to future productions.

**Marian Nell**  
**Janet Shapiro**

**April 2002**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

During 2001, ABC Ulwazi, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which produces programmes for community radio stations and trains the personnel, paid and voluntary, of community radio stations, produced the first in what will be a three-part series called *Rebuilding Civil Society: Democracy in Deed*. Series 1 is made up of 13 programmes, each between 15 and 20 minutes in length. All the programmes were recorded only in English, although there is some use of other South African languages in conversation and in the vox pops at the beginning. Each episode of the series has the following format:

- ◆ Introduction, including (after the first episode) a recap of the previous “story” and a brief discussion between the presenter and an expert in local government. There is also a medley of vox pops in different languages
- ◆ An episode of a “soapie” (popular drama) about an informal settlement called Phaphamani, somewhere in South Africa. Each episode carries a message or messages about the responsibilities of local government and the responsibilities of citizens in relation to local government. There is also information about how local government works.
- ◆ An ending in which an expert in local government discusses the messages, or some of them, with the presenter.

ABC Ulwazi also made a generic promo segment that can be used to advertise the series on air, and a promo segment for each episode.

Presenters from 30 stations throughout the country were then trained to contextualise the series for their local listeners. ABC Ulwazi made attendance at this training a condition for providing the series for flighting. Most stations broadcast the series in late November through to January 2002. In some cases flighting was delayed.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, Series 2 went into production and is now ready for distribution. A series of workshops was held with presenters from the 30 stations in March 2002 to prepare them for contextualisation in the local situation. Series 2 has been recorded in isiZulu and seSotho, as well as English.

Towards the end of February 2002, ABC Ulwazi requested Nell and Shapiro cc, a consultancy, to do an audience reception study on Series 1, in order to give the organisation some idea of how the Series had been received by listeners, and whether or not it had had an impact. The findings would feed into Series 3 which was about to go into production.

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<sup>1</sup> So, for example QwaQwa Radio delayed flighting until it had translated all the programmes into seSotho. Radio Riverside was unable to complete flighting the series because of tensions it was having with the Local Council. (The Board decided, given the tensions, it would not flight the series after only two episodes had been broadcast.)

## 1.2 SUMMARY OF SERIES 1

The story line deals with an informal settlement called Phaphamani. The emphasis is on the role of ordinary citizens in building democracy at the local level. The series begins with the drowning of a little girl in an open ditch and then describes the path taken by a woman, Naledi, in trying to make a difference. She begins by knowing nothing about local government and, at the end, she is preparing to stand as a councillor. In the course of the series, the people of Phaphamani are threatened with removals and have to deal with this.

The issues touched on, and messages transmitted, are wide-ranging. The central theme is that democracy can only work if ordinary people take an interest in local government and take part in civic organisations and activities:

*If you get involved you can make a difference.*

Sub-themes include:

- ◆ the obligations of local government;
- ◆ the responsibilities of ordinary citizens;
- ◆ xenophobia (one of the characters, Matools, is a Mozambican in the country illegally);
- ◆ corruption and lack of transparency;
- ◆ non-payment for services and illegal use of services;
- ◆ alienation of young people from the political system (in this case personified by Big Boy, the son of Naledi);
- ◆ lack of willingness on the part of those who are better off to be associated with those who are worse off (referred to in the series as the “NIMBY” or “not in my backyard” syndrome and personified by MaKhumalo);<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ how ordinary people can participate in local government, in democracy and in making their own community a better place to live;
- ◆ youth and civic involvement;
- ◆ the need for unity in communities

Along with the messages, there is hard information about how local government works, and there are explanations of terms such as “wards”, “budgetary constraints”, “demarcation”, “party membership” versus “independents”

There is also a “love interest”. Naledi is a widow who dreams about her late husband, Moses, but gets close to a “good” councillor, Thabo, as the series progresses.

Each episode is introduced and faded out with a “ditty” based on the spelling out of the word “Democracy”. In addition, music is played at various other times as part of the story line (Big Boy is a musician).

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<sup>2</sup> This is an important theme in the South African context where the linking of areas that are less well-off with those that are better off is part of the strategy .

A detailed script/storyboard is available, in addition to the compact disks with the programmes and promos.

### 1.3 PREPARATORY AND FOLLOW-UP WORK

During 2001, ABC Ulwazi commissioned a full-scale evaluation of its work, both training and programmes.<sup>3</sup> One of the recommendations of that study was that there be more consultation around programmes before and during production, both with community radio stations and with listeners. ABC Ulwazi seems to have taken at least the recommendation about listeners seriously. Clacherty and Associates, another consultancy, were asked to test the story outlines of all 13 episodes with two groups of adults, one in an informal settlement and one in a farming area. This was done in the first half of 2001, before finalisation of production. The consultants “told the story” and invited responses. In general, responses were positive:

- ◆ the setting was seen as realistic and relevant to the lives of the respondents;
- ◆ the characters were realistic and easy to identify with;
- ◆ key messages were understood.

Once the series was ready, ABC Ulwazi offered it to a number of community radio stations, but on the condition that they sent a presenter for training on how to contextualise the series for local conditions. Thirty stations responded positively and the workshop was run. From the training manual, it seems as if the emphasis was on generic skills related to presenting current affairs type programmes in a local context, rather than specifically focused on the actual series. So, for example, there was a lot in the manual on interviewing and interviewing skills and on producing documentaries, with single page inserts related specifically to *Democracy in Deed*. When we interviewed a group of presenters who attended the training around Series 2, they expressed considerable satisfaction with the fact that this second training had, in addition to building on generic skills, also focused on issues to do with local government. They said that they now felt equipped, in terms of content understanding, to present a programme on local government. There were comments such as:

*Now I know more than the local councillor.*

*Now I am an expert on local government and my station can use me for this.*

Some of them had attended the first training as well, whereas, for others, this was their first exposure.

ABC Ulwazi asked stations that had flighted the series to complete and return questionnaires after the flighting. Nine<sup>4</sup> of the 30 did so. Some useful information emerged from an analysis of these nine questionnaires. So, for example:

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<sup>3</sup> This was also done by Nell and Shapiro cc.

<sup>4</sup> These nine were:

- ◆ Radio Atlantis

- ◆ It seems the generic promo (which was available in isiZulu, isiXhosa and English) was popular among stations and listeners. Most of the nine had also used the specific promos for each episode.
- ◆ A number of stations (six out of the nine) had done their own vox pops for at least one of the episodes.
- ◆ All but one of the nine stations had a list of possible local guests to use with the series and seven of them had already had invited local guests on air with the series. A few had had unco-operative responses from local councillors. (This also came out in the feedback from presenters attending the training for Series 2. They said that the community radio station was sometimes ignored by councillors who preferred the national/commercial broadcasters.)
- ◆ Only three of the nine had used the whole of each episode, as done by ABC Ulwazi. Three had used only the actual drama and two had used all except the expert slot at the end.<sup>5</sup> At least one had brought in a local “expert”, in this case a student studying local government.
- ◆ Seven of the nine had repeated some or all of each episode.
- ◆ Most were positive about flighting Series 2 as well as about being committed to localising the series. However, in some cases the lack of telephones in the community was cited as a problem for phone-ins, and one of these stations said it needed field recorders in order to get community interaction. (Access to a field recorder was one of the requirements for stations attending the training for Series 2. At this training, other suggestions for getting to listeners without telephones were also made. These included offering a post box service or a listeners’ box at the station itself; developing quizzes and competitions to keep listeners tuned in; offering “freebies” at the station.)
- ◆ Only one claimed to have started evaluating Series 1. Although a number said they had kept records of people writing or phoning in about the series (as requested by ABC Ulwazi), for most of those stations which were afterwards contacted for the audience reception study, this seemed not to be the case.
- ◆ Although three of the nine stations said they had used the series to try to attract local advertising, none said it had found sponsorship or funding and eight out of the nine said they needed more expert help in marketing the series to listeners. This was picked up in the training for Series 2 where a session was run on “simple marketing ploys”. Presumably there is a link between increasing listenership and being able to attract local advertising, but perhaps this last area needs more specific attention in future training. (Some ideas were suggested at the Series 2 training, including tapping into local shops, hairdressers, spazas etc, offering quality jingles and good prices, networking with local papers to get advertising for the station, providing businesses with proof of listenership to show the popularity of the series.)

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- ◆ Barberton Community Radio
  - ◆ Ilitha Community Radio
  - ◆ Khanya Community Radio
  - ◆ Mosupatsela Community Radio
  - ◆ Naledi Community Radio
  - ◆ QwaQwa Radio
  - ◆ Radio Teemaneng Stereo
  - ◆ Unitra Community Radio

<sup>5</sup> QwaQwa Radio had not yet broadcast at the time of completing the questionnaire.

- ◆ Four of the nine specifically mentioned that the use of English only was a problem.

All of this provides useful input to future programmes and training. It seemed to us that ABC Ulwazi was initiating more ongoing contact with stations in order to inform its programming than it had done in the past.

## SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

ABC Ulwazi asked us to do a qualitative audience reception study of *Rebuilding Civil Society: Democracy in Deed: Series 1*. Following on from the earlier evaluation, the organisation called in evaluators much sooner than it had previously done, and quite soon after actual flighting. This made it more likely that listeners would recall the series and, in fact, except in one case (see below) this proved to be the case.<sup>6</sup>

Initially when ABC Ulwazi approached us to do this audience reception study, it was hoping to cover about 20 stations nationally, and, when it was clear that this would be too expensive, 10 stations with two focus groups in each station. However, financial constraints made this impossible. The problem with trying to be national is that transport is very costly. If ABC Ulwazi wants to do a study like this nationally, then it needs to budget for high travel/transport costs.<sup>7</sup> In the end, we agreed with ABC Ulwazi that we would do one focus group in each of 10 stations, covering Gauteng, the Free State and KwaZulu/Natal. However, when we contacted the KwaZulu/Natal stations, we found that, in fact, they had not flighted the series, and this was also the case with one of the Free State stations. We then had to find alternatives that would not add to the travel budget. ABC Ulwazi also wanted to have a spread of urban and rural stations, and to include some stations which had returned the follow-up questionnaire. Time was tight as ABC Ulwazi needed a report by the end of April in order to feed findings and recommendations into Series 3. With the cost and time constraints and the problems with stations identified not having flighted the series, we were reduced to nine stations as follows:

Name of station	Urban/rural	Feedback questionnaire	Province	Comments
Kangala Community Radio Services	Peri-urban	×	Mpumalanga	12 participants in focus group
Barberton Community Radio	Rural	✓	Mpumalanga	10 participants in focus group
QwaQwa Radio	Rural	✓	Free State	10 participants in focus group
Naledi Community Radio	Rural	✓	Free State	10 participants in focus group
Mosupatsela FM Stereo	Peri-urban	✓	Free State	10 participants in focus group

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that it was most difficult to recruit focus group participants in the urban areas of Gauteng. The three Gauteng groups all had fewer than the hoped for 10 people per group. However, Jozi FM in Soweto was the only station included which was unable to recruit a focus group at all.

<sup>7</sup> A group of presenters who had come for the second round of training was interviewed as part of this process. They came from the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and the Northern Cape and were quite upset that their stations had not been included in the audience reception/impact study. How this cost dilemma can be addressed needs to be discussed within ABC Ulwazi.

ALX FM	Urban	×	Gauteng	7 participants in focus group
Jozi FM	Urban	×	Gauteng	Were unable to get together a focus group. Said that, despite broadcasting for participants, they did not get a response. The fieldworker spent literally days trying to make this happen, and ABC Ulwazi also intervened. In the end we had to accept that it was not possible.
TNG Radio	Urban	×	Gauteng	There were seven participants in the focus group. This station focuses mainly on the 16-35 age group.
Soshanguve	Urban	×	Gauteng	The station manager was unhappy about participating and feels that the station is exploited by NGOs such as ABC Ulwazi. He says they will not participate in future such assessments. There were six participants in the focus group. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Although Soshanguve was the only station to articulate this dissatisfaction with NGOs producing programmes, it is worth noting what the station manager said as it has, at the least, long term implications for organisations such as ABC Ulwazi. In brief, his position is that it would be better for ABC Ulwazi to pay stations to flight its programmes, even if this meant charging stations for training. This would give stations a source of income and would mean that they were more selective in choosing training opportunities. If ABC Ulwazi wants its programmes to be flighted without paying, then it needs to consult far more widely before it decides what programmes to make, it needs to involve the community radio stations in making the programmes and to use their knowledge of their communities in the process. The station manager points out that, much as stations need organisations like ABC Ulwazi, so do the organisations need the stations as they will not get funding for programmes unless the stations are willing to flight them. The station manager said that the station would not “participate in the next series if there is no financial reward for the station.”

Thus, eight focus groups were ultimately run, and a total of 72 participants took part. Of these, 35 were men and 37 women, and the majority (about two thirds) were between 18 and 30. There tended to be more women in the rural groups and more men in the urban groups. On the whole, fieldworkers did not report any significant differences between male and female responses, although in the urban stations, men tended to dominate in the focus groups. In most of the groups, the fieldworkers reported lively interaction between participants during the discussions. In some groups, participants were interested to know whether their comments would be considered in the production of future series. ABC Ulwazi might want to consider doing a “spot “ to go with Series 3 which indicates some of the ideas taken from listeners. This might well motivate people to participate in future audience reception assessments.

We contracted experienced fieldworkers/researchers who spoke the local languages. They were carefully briefed and listened to the programmes. After we had made initial contact with the stations, the fieldworkers negotiated with a contact at each station to recruit participants for the focus groups. Recruiters were paid R 10 per person recruited who had actually listened to some or all of the series. This worked well in the rural areas particularly, as the figures show. Participants were not paid but received an ABC Ulwazi T-shirt as a gift at the end of the group. Money was made available to the stations to pay for refreshments and for the participants' transport.

At each station, in addition to the focus groups, fieldworkers also interviewed the presenter of the series and/or another staff member/volunteer. At QwaQwa Radio, the Programme Manager and the presenter were interviewed (separately). At Soshanguve, the station manager was interviewed because the presenter (trained by ABC Ulwazi) is a teacher who is not available during the day. At Barberton, two presenters and the station manager were interviewed. At Kangala the station manager and the presenter were interviewed. In all, twelve people were interviewed, of whom five had been directly trained by ABC Ulwazi around the series.<sup>9</sup> Several of those who had been trained had also then trained co-presenters when they got back to the station.

Both the focus group interviews and the presenter interviews were guided by interview schedules which we designed and amended after input from ABC Ulwazi. These schedules (included as Appendix 1) were informed by documentation provided by ABC Ulwazi, including the storyboard/script and the manual for the training for Series 1.

One of the consultants did a brief interview with a group of presenters from stations that were not included in the sample. They were mainly from stations in the Northern Cape, the Western Cape and the Eastern Province.<sup>10</sup> They were in Johannesburg

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<sup>9</sup> Those trained were from Alx FM, Kangala Community Radio Services, Barberton Community Radio, Qwa-Qwa Radio and Naledi Community Radio.

<sup>10</sup> The stations represented at this interview were:

- ◆ Radio KC
- ◆ Radio Atlantis
- ◆ Botlokwa Community Radio (Northern Province)

for training on Series 2. In addition, the producer of the programmes, who also ran the Series 2 workshops, provided written input from presenters attending Series 2 training.

The focus group transcripts (available as a separate annexure) and interviews were then analysed thematically and the findings from the analysis written up in this report which was made available to ABC Ulwazi for comment before being finalised.

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- ◆ Khanya Community Radio
  - ◆ Ilitha Community Radio Station
  - ◆ Radio Riverside
  - ◆ Radio Teemaneng
  - ◆ Unitra Community Radio
  - ◆ Vukani Community Radio

## **SECTION 3: FINDINGS**

### **3.1 STATION INPUT<sup>11</sup>**

Although the emphasis of this report is on the findings from the focus groups, it is useful to note some of the comments made and input given by station personnel.

#### **3.1.1 Station understanding of the messages**

Clearly, the degree to which messages in a series of this nature are understood by the listeners has something to do with the level of understanding of the station personnel. This is particularly so when efforts have been made to contextualise the series for the local listenership and/or to translate the series into a local language. In general, those station personnel with whom we spoke had identified the main message of the series as “the need for local communities to participate in local government”. In some cases, station personnel seemed to have missed the “reciprocal” message – that successful local government is as much about what ordinary citizens do as about what local authority structures do. They tended to focus on the responsibilities of the local authorities.

The main sub-theme identified (and this was the same for the focus group participants) was the message against xenophobia. In 2001 when we did a similar exercise around the ABC Ulwazi series that focused on xenophobia, some stations felt that it was not a topic relevant to them. This is no longer the case. All the stations we spoke to (including ones in areas such as the former Transkei) now see xenophobia as an important issue.

#### **3.1.2 Station response to the series**

With one exception, all station personnel were positive about the series. The exception was a station which sees itself as serving, largely, a student or youth listenership (TNG). Both the presenter and a number of focus group participants complained that the series was not sufficiently targeted for them<sup>12</sup>, referring to format, language and music. The presenter felt that there was too much in each episode and that the introduction of the “makwerekwere” sub-theme was confusing. He also said it was “not true to life” and gave as his example “having to wait for a fundraising concert, which possibly takes time to organise, before the burial of Busi.” In general, however, station personnel had liked the series, had found it relevant to their target groups and said it was “not only entertaining but also very educating.” They found the contents very relevant to their listenership. So, for example, one said:

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<sup>11</sup> We have included here input from the group session run by one of the consultants with presenters being trained around Series 2.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that this station had made little or no effort to contextualise the series for its listenership. It had not done its own vox pops, it had not translated the series because “we were busy with other things at the station”. And, despite the criticisms of everything from format to content, in the focus group there were a number of positive responses and excellent recall of detail.

*A very interesting discussion ensued between municipal officials and listeners around electricity cuts. What made the discussion lively is that I played the episode related to illegal electrical connections.*

At another station there was a bond boycott in the community at the time when the series was being broadcast.

Not all the stations we spoke to had used the series in the ABC Ulwazi format. So, for example, one Western Cape station didn't use the drama but included the issues in a talk/discussion show. The presenter said he thought they would use the drama for Series 2. In most cases, station personnel had found the format very good.<sup>13</sup> They said the story was easy to follow and that the characters were easy to identify with. One station mentioned particularly that they had found the technical aspects of the programme excellent. One of the stations had translated the entire series into seSotho, using voices from the community, which it saw as an added bonus.

The music was less popular among the station personnel. While in some cases they said it was "fine", there were complaints that it did not appeal to the youth, that more kwaito should have been used, that the English words were a problem, and that the introductory jingle "made people think it was a kiddies' programme".

### **3.1.3 Contextualisation**

All the stations which broadcast the series had sent a presenter to the training on the first series. Most had found this training useful. One presenter said that the training on the first series was not helpful, but "I must say that the training for the second series was excellent". Her problem seems to have been that the training on the first series was too generic (she is someone who has had plenty of basic skills training), while the training for the second series was far more specific to the content and challenges of the series itself. For other presenters, those who had less basic training, or none at all, the training for the first series had helped a lot.

Most of the stations had made an effort to localise the series in some way. One station totally re-recorded the drama in seSotho, while others translated parts of it.<sup>14</sup> Most had invited guests such as local councillors to discuss the issues. Some had done their own vox pops but a number said they did not have access to field recorders and so could not. One station had used its own vox pops but had also done more:

*We used our own characters for the drama, using the same storyline.  
We did it in isiNdebele and isiZulu.*

This station had flighted the series on a youth talk show and said it had been found to be very relevant. Another station had run a competition, testing recall of the information in the series and had given station T-shirts as prizes.

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<sup>13</sup> In one case, an interviewee noted that this "story format" was culturally familiar to the people.

<sup>14</sup> All three of the stations in the Free State had done some level of translation into seSotho.

### **3.1.4 Language**

Language was an issue. All but two stations felt that the almost exclusive use of English was a major problem. Two (both urban) said English was alright but that it would be better to use other languages as well. There was a particular concern (also expressed in the focus groups) about older people not being able to understand the English and an assumption that younger people, even in the more rural areas, would. Some stations dealt with the language issue innovatively (as described above), while others had been resigned to the inadequacies of using English. At the training for Series 2, when this was discussed, it was suggested that stations re-enact scenarios from the drama in their own languages, using local talent, and highlighting local issues. This was workshopped in the training for Series 2 (which will also be available in seSotho and isiZulu).

### **3.1.5 Impact**

Although their input is only anecdotal, most of the stations were positive about the impact they thought the series had had. All the stations, including the most critical, said that they thought people had really listened to the programmes and cited responses by phone and letter, to support this impression. They also felt it had made a difference to understanding and even to behaviour:

*It created awareness of the structure of the municipality.*

*It changed the way the community sees the importance of our local government, how things can be intensified through ward committees.*

*Since we flighted the series, our councillors are taking part and talking to the community. They nominated one person who now communicates with the media.*

*People now understand how important ward council meetings are .*

*The community policing forum has intensified its activities.*

*People started demanding service provision as they were encouraged by their knowledge gained from the series ... Councillors were put under pressure to deliver as promised.*

*It introduced some changes in the townships ... councillors realised they had to deliver. They even provided the community with the schedule for picking up wastes.*

### **3.1.6 General input from the stations**

Although all the stations felt that the topic and themes of the series were relevant, a number also felt that ABC Ulwazi needed to do more research on what were priority topics and issues for the stations. In giving input to the fieldworkers, they came up with a shopping list of topics in which those mentioned most often were:

- ◆ HIV/AIDS
- ◆ Job creation
- ◆ Crime prevention
- ◆ Rights for marginalised groups such as the disabled and pensioners.

But others were mentioned and included teenage pregnancy, environmental degradation and basic human rights.

Some of the stations were struggling a bit with how one provides entertainment and education together. While they liked the drama format because it lends itself to this combination of “edutainment”, they wondered if it could be done as “comedy drama” and “not always so serious”.

One last point here: It seemed to us that the more positive presenters were, the more positive the listeners were, and that in the one case where the presenter was almost hyper-critical, this was reflected in the focus group. ABC Ulwazi is making a major effort, through the training that goes with the programmes, to make presenters positive about the series. Perhaps more could be done to get stations to endorse choice of topics, to “buy in” before a series is even made. Because the stations are not homogeneous, it might be useful to invite input even after a topic has been selected. So, for example, a fax saying: “We are doing a dramatised series on ... . We would appreciate input from you on what particular aspects you think would be important for your listeners. Is there anything that would make it more likely that your listeners would tune in to and enjoy such a series?” or something along those lines. Perhaps they also need to be asked who in their communities would be likely to sponsor such programmes, or buy advertising to cover the costs of flighting such programmes. Some research here might make the process more commercially viable. In the long-term, it seems likely that sustainability in the sector will depend on stations wanting programmes that are produced, and being prepared and able to buy them.

### **3.2 AUDIENCE RECEPTION**

This section deals specifically with what came out of the focus groups. We have analysed the focus group transcripts in terms of the key themes we thought would be of interest to ABC Ulwazi, as follows:

- ◆ Understanding of the messages – did the messages come across, and were they accepted?
- ◆ Identification with and enjoyment of the series – was it “real” for people? Did they feel “this could be us”? Did they engage with the issues and talk about them? Did they do anything as a result of having listened to the programmes? Were they entertained?
- ◆ Retention – in terms of memory of messages and of the storyline. How much recall did people have of the messages, the characters, the story? Did they make an impression?
- ◆ Information gained – what do they now know that they didn’t know before? What information about local government and how it works have they acquired?

- ◆ General input from the focus groups to the producers of the series and to the stations.

### 3.2.1 Understanding the messages

Here we looked at the main theme and at some of the sub-themes in the series.

In general, the main theme that successful democracy requires responsible engagement from ordinary citizens, and that local government and local affairs are an appropriate place for such engagement (called “empowerment through local government” by one respondent), was well understood:

*The series was about the active involvement of the community in issues that affect them. It is important that the community identifies their problems rather than sit and complain all the time about government not doing anything. The series was about our responsibilities to take action and become actively involved in our communities. We should also make sure we work with our councillors so that they know our problems and resolve them accordingly. So I learned that we should assume responsibility by playing an active role in resolving our problems rather than wait for councillors. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*We should play an active role and participate. The ignorance is our biggest enemy. We should be active in the community. The betterment of our society depends on us. (TNG)*

*Phaphamani community made me realise that I can stand up and do something for my community. (Kangala Community Radio Services)*

It was also interesting to note that the focus groups did not just turn into “let’s gripe about our local councillors” sessions. In some instances, even success stories about working with the local councillors were quoted:

*Where I used to stay, we had a very good relationship with our councillor. At the time we did not have a library so, as students, we approached our headmaster, asking him to use one of the classrooms as a reading room. He indicated that, since the school belongs to the community, it would be advisable if we could take up the issue with our councillor. Indeed, we did, and the councillor called a community meeting and they reached an agreement that one of the classrooms could be used as a reading room, particularly over weekends. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

Some respondents focused more on the need for joint community action, but it was a reflection of the same understanding that it is up to ordinary people to make a difference, and that they can make a difference:

*The series was about democracy. The main theme is about people coming together for a common cause. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*I learned that a joint effort, working together as a community can help reach the community's goals. Busi fell into the ditch and died, the community helped each other in making sure that the same incident doesn't happen again. Communities must work together as one; they must unite in order to reach their objectives. (Kangala Community Radio Services)*

*I liked the willingness of the Phaphamani community to work together. This encouraged me to realise that, if people work together they are able to achieve their goals. ... They took initiatives to better their community. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

However, at Alx FM, there was a strong feeling from certain members of the group that the series did not always raise the right issues and did not give enough answers:

*The series did not highlight most of the problems that the community face, like racism, bribery, corruption within local councils ... the series should give an indication of how certain issues could be resolved so as to help us when confronted by them ... even when there is no conclusion, the series should give alternatives of how to resolve problems. However, they should (not) appear like they are being imposed.<sup>15</sup>*

One of the respondents at TNG felt that the “narrator” was always “against the government” and that the series was “provoking people to turn against the government”. He said “they” were “imposing ideas”. We doubt that the actual programmes support this interpretation, and we are not sure who is meant by “the narrator”, but it does highlight the fact that a series of this nature has to tread a careful path between putting across messages and antagonising audiences.

In some groups, the sub-theme around xenophobia was seen as the main theme and dominated discussions:

*I think the most important one (message) relates to the attitude we have towards foreigners or people who come from African countries, that we tend to ignore them that they cannot identify certain problems which we have as citizens of this country. (TNG)*

Although positions on the message about xenophobia remained diverse, the responses from the urban groups tended to be more uniformly positive.<sup>16</sup> This had

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<sup>15</sup> With some people, it will always be hard to win! Certainly the series does deal with issues like corruption and makes implicit suggestions on how to deal with them, and most people seem to have picked this up.

<sup>16</sup> The exception was the person at TNG who said:

something to do with the character of Matools who was positively viewed by almost all the urban respondents. This was a fairly typical response:

*Coming to discrimination and deportation of foreigners, I think it is a problem, but we need to understand why these people have to leave in that way. For example, if you are (under) pressure because of death threats or war, I don't think I will have time to go to the Department of Home Affairs and to make the necessary arrangements. What comes to my mind is just to flee the country. (Alx FM)*

Far more negative feelings were expressed about foreigners in the more rural and peri-urban areas:

*Makwerekwere they do a lot of crime, they change people's ID documents, they break into people's homes ... They take our jobs because they accept low salaries ... . (Kangala Community Services)*

At Barberton Community Radio, there was an interesting "take" on how the series presented Matools:

*I'm a bit concerned about the series, the approach that we have to be taught by a foreigner how to run things in our country. The foreigner, who is illegal, is teaching people in their own locality how to approach situations. It is wrong. He is the only one who comes up with good suggestions. He was the one leading the community.*

Others in the group agreed:

*Why should we be taught by a foreigner what to do?*

However, the message Matools is meant to give in the series, that illegal immigrants can be worthwhile members of the community too, was not lost on everyone. At Naledi Community Radio, respondents were unanimous in their opinion that "foreigners take South African jobs". Nevertheless, they liked Matools and this definitely moderated their views on foreigners:

*He comes with advises and is very helpful.*

Others made these comments:

*They are skilled, they are excellent artists. One other important thing, they have respect for people. They can handle people with respect, much better than us South Africans. (Kangala Community Services)*

*They can be very helpful. We also had a ditch at Hlabelele. They helped us with the ditch. (Kangala Community Services)*

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*I think the main problem why people do not like foreigners is that the majority of them are involved in drugs and they sell fake items.*

*People like Matools must be allowed in our communities and they are helpful and human beings like us. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*When we are outside in their countries we don't want to be called foreigners and we want to be accepted and be part of them. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

One respondent (from Barberton Community Radio) felt that the xenophobia sub-theme was too strong:

*It (the series) was excellent – but they deviated by adding xenophobia and other things. The real content was lost – democracy.*

Another of the sub-themes was the hypocrisy of people like MaKhumalo and, in particular, her “not in my backyard” attitude (NIMBY). Here our feeling was that the people at the Free State stations understood this message far better than did those from the other groups. The Free State respondents understood that her behaviour and attitudes were “not acceptable” because “they showed hatred”. At QwaQwa, they continued:

*... there are people living in shacks and people do not like them. The reason is their houses will lose value. MaKhumalo stayed in a house with a high value. On earth a person is a person because of other people. We need to love each other.*

At Mosupatsela they said:

*They were poor people and are typical of someone who discriminates against others (the poor). (MaKhumalo) is a person of high class. But Naledi was the opposite of MaKhumalo as she taught people that they have to help those who cannot afford.*

At Naledi:

*People who stay in better houses undermine those that don't have better houses. They think people from poor places don't wash, they are dirty, and they are crooks. ... people at the informal settlement belonged to a lower stratum of the society not by choice, but were forced by circumstances beyond their control like poverty. ... MaKhumalo is selfish and looking at her (interests) and does not care about others in her vicinity.*

Most of the respondents in the other groups seemed to have a sneaking sympathy for MaKhumalo, and to share her concern about the drop in property values that might take place if “you let them in”:

*She is justified to feel the way she did. (Kangala Community Services)*

*Nobody wants to have the value of their house dropping. (Barberton Community Radio)*

Another sub-theme related to Naledi as a strong, capable woman, raising gender issues. In fact, the notion that women can be, and often are, strong and capable was accepted across the board, by urban and rural groups and by men and women.

*With regard to Naledi, I think she showed that a woman's place is no longer in the kitchen. We want to be independent and do things for ourselves. (TNG)*

*Definitely we learned that women are just as capable as men. (Kangala Community Services)*

*I learned that women are capable, they have self-esteem and self-confidence, they can do whatever they want, they can make changes in communities. (Kangala Community Services)*

*In most cases when women come together there is progress – arguments are minimal where women are concerned. They don't argue about phrases like we do, we men. Men would argue over a word, not the content itself or the main aspect of what we are discussing. Most of our meetings drag for a long time because somebody wants a certain sentence to be phrased correctly. With women it is different. They are able to address direct issues if given an opportunity to do so. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*In most cases women are not taken seriously. Generally people think women cannot take part in community issues, the men are given preference. ... We're all living in the community and all problems are facing us, not men, not women, each and every one of us. We must unite and solve our problems together. (Barberton Community Radio)*

However, at TNG, one respondent felt that the series boosted women and foreigners at the expense of the youth and that, via Big Boy, it carried negative messages about youth:

*Even when I try to analyse the programmes in terms of responsibility, Matoos approaches Naledi and they talk about what they can do. There is no indication of what part BB can play in this regard. It does not highlight any responsibility that young people have to take. It only refers to adult responsibilities.*

There were a number of other sub-themes, largely to do with *how* one goes about getting involved in building democracy. They include:

- ◆ paying for services (“services need payment”; “we must pay for water and electricity and if we fail to pay due to lack of money we must negotiate with our service providers”);
- ◆ not using services such as electricity illegally (“with regard to electricity, this series has warned me to stop tampering with electricity; “I would like to teach my community about the dangers of illegal connections”);

- ◆ using community structures to get things done (“I have learned to work with councillors”; “councillors must serve the people through addressing needs in their wards”; “you can be members of ward committees”);
- ◆ negotiating rather than toyi-toying.

The level of engagement around the message sub-text during the focus group discussions suggests that, in most cases, even when they were not fully accepted, the messages got through.<sup>17</sup> One respondent (Alx FM) noted:

*I liked the messages of the programmes. They were challenging, wanting you to change.*

### 3.2.2 Information gained and retained

While we asked specific questions related to information in the series, it was also immediately clear that broad understanding and information messages had been absorbed by listeners.

*I didn't know that it is possible for “lekwerekwere” to identify the problems which you and I couldn't identify before or a person from outside can be aware of the problems that affect you while you are not even aware of them. That was a turning point (for me). (TNG)*

*I didn't know I could assume an active role in society. (TNG)*

*One thing I learned that even people who stay in an informal settlement, they have a voice too. That is what I learned – that they could also take up issues that affect them. (TNG)*

*I learned about (the) ward committee and its function. I did not know that we could also use them to reach our councillor. (Alx FM)*

*I remember where they were talking about relocating residents of an informal settlement to another place. New information I got there was that they also have certain rights and that they can negotiate with authorities to give them a chance to prepare themselves to move from that area. (Alx FM)*

*I learned a lot. I've always thought that everything must be done by councillors – even if there were mistakes we would wait for the councillor to do something. I learned from Naledi that you can stand up and make a difference. You can look for the councillor and tell him your grievances. (Kangala Community Services)*

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, although one would have expected MaKhumalo to be the “person we love to hate”, she didn't get that much attention and this might be because the NIMBY message was not fully understood.

*I learned that you don't need to be very educated to become a councillor. Anybody who's anybody can enter for the elections and become a councillor. (Kangala Community Services)*

*Honesty is the key if you are dealing with a community. (Kangala Community Services)*

*I want to emphasise that I did not know about democracy, I didn't know that we can sit with our representatives and share ideas with them, tell them our grievances. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*We received information from this series. Now we are able to go to councillors and work with them to resolve our problems. We did not realise that councillors could help remove the scrap cars that can be the home of criminals where they rape passers-by. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*It teaches us what type of councillors do we want to elect to serve our community. (QwaQwa Radio)*

More specifically, in answer to information-based questions, this is what people reported learning:

### ***On how to communicate with your local council and councillors***

*Through ward committees, you will get most of the people who are represented. We have now learned that councillors report to Council Chamber, that is where they meet. (Kangala Community Services)*

People learned about:

- ◆ wards and ward representatives;
- ◆ demarcation;
- ◆ channels of communication;
- ◆ where to find your councillor (at his/her offices);
- ◆ the power of community radio in getting a message across to the council and councillors;
- ◆ the importance of various community meetings;
- ◆ what a Council Chamber meeting is;
- ◆ the importance of negotiation versus confrontation.

### ***On how councillors should communicate with you and the community***

*The council should communicate with us through meetings ... they could also use community radio stations to reach listeners. (TNG)*

People learned about:

- ◆ the importance of attending meetings to hear what councillors have to say;

- ◆ the importance of community radio stations as a means for communication;
- ◆ the importance of ward committees as a channel of information;
- ◆ using concerts and social functions as a forum for providing information;
- ◆ the importance of demanding transparency and information;
- ◆ the usefulness of pamphlets that provide information.

***On what ordinary citizens should do when they are having problems***

*If we keep quiet and complain without making them aware of our concerns, then nothing is going to happen. (Alx FM)*

People learned about:

- ◆ what to do when a councillor isn't available or doesn't make himself/herself available (joint action);
- ◆ using the ward committees;
- ◆ using the community radio station;
- ◆ the importance of getting to your councillor and informing him/her of problems;
- ◆ using municipal offices as a contact point;
- ◆ organising meetings to address issues;
- ◆ the importance of paying for services;
- ◆ using community structures to take up problems;
- ◆ getting unanimity in the community as a basis for communication with councillors and for negotiation on the way forward.

***On what ordinary citizens should do to participate actively in democracy***

*You don't have to be a politician. (from all the groups)*

People learned about:

- ◆ volunteering your services in places like the community radio station;
- ◆ getting involved in community projects aimed at improving the quality of life of the community;
- ◆ finding ways to be a contributing citizen, participating in the social and economic life of the community;
- ◆ using the right channels to solve problems;
- ◆ the importance of accessing information;
- ◆ the importance of acting in a responsible way, not abusing rights or failing to consider the rights of others, and taking responsibility for developing the community;
- ◆ joint action to address problems;
- ◆ getting the community involved in fundraising;
- ◆ getting organised whether through street committees, block committees, ward committees or social clubs, youth clubs, women's clubs;
- ◆ electing people who take part in community affairs to public positions.

### **On how one becomes a local councillor**

*I gained a lot of knowledge from the programme. I initially thought that in order to become a councillor you must be a graduate. Now I know that all you need is the capability to talk, and self-confidence and focus.*  
(Kangala Community Services)

People learned about:

- ◆ the importance of becoming involved in community affairs;
- ◆ the importance of finding out information and becoming knowledgeable;
- ◆ the difficulties of standing as an independent;
- ◆ the importance of self-confidence;
- ◆ the importance of impartiality;
- ◆ the importance of knowing what is going on around you;
- ◆ the importance of using the ward council as a starting point;
- ◆ the importance of having a vision, of knowing what needs to be changed and having some ideas about how to go about it;
- ◆ the importance of having some kind of mentor or advisor;
- ◆ using someone like Naledi as a role model!

### **3.2.3 Identification with and Enjoyment of the Series**

How **realistic** did listeners find the series? Did they feel as if these incidents could happen to them?

Participants in all the groups found the situation realistic and many had immediate associations with things that were happening or had happened in their communities.

*It is realistic. There was a ditch next to where I stay in which a young child fell and injured her arm. My mother was concerned about the matter and went to report the issue at the municipal offices. Although they ultimately responded, they never finished their work – they never closed that ditch completely.* (Soshanguve Community Radio)

*If you walk around Alex you will find a lot of electric cords all over the street. People are using electricity illegally ... there was once an incident of a child who died from being electrocuted. He touched these cords and he died.* (Alx FM)

*My elder brother, my aunt's son, he was like a brother to me, he was killed by electric shock. He died instantly.* (Kangala Community Services)

From Barberton, there was a story of a child who nearly drowned in a swimming pool, and from the group at QwaQwa Radio:

*A similar incident did happen in Makgwaneng village two or three years back. The accident was caused by a pit from a toilet. The drama will*

*motivate our councillors to erect sewerage to (of) dispose sanitary wastage.*

Other comparable situations were mentioned, such as a child drinking paraffin or taking poison, or a fire in a shack. People were very specific about the links to their own situations, indicating a real identification:

*I remember that period when they were at the fundraising concert and the lights went off. I think that part was well done because it appeared real because I could think of instances when our lights went off. We would run around, trying to find any fault and fixing that. That was good. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

In the more rural areas, some doubts were expressed about all the problems being relevant in a rural area, although there was agreement that the story about the child who had to stay home to accompany a grandparent to the pension payout was recognised as “very common in our area”. People also said:

*Most of the vox pops, I could sense that they are from the urban areas, (But) the programme was nicely done. Although we are from the rural areas, we learnt something from it. (Kangala Community Services)*

The general conclusion was:

*... as a community we need to discuss such issues because our children are in danger.*

In addition, they clearly **responded to the characters** as being familiar types. Most of the characters evoked quite strong responses. So, for example, Naledi was universally liked, as was Matoos, but Big Boy evoked strong responses, both for and against. On the whole, both men and women were equally positive about Naledi as a strong women character and felt they knew women like her, “just like my mother”.<sup>18</sup> Although MaKhumalo was not very popular, in most instances there was some sympathy for her, particularly around the devaluing of property.<sup>19</sup>

Councillor Grootboom was another popular character, but there were a few respondents who were critical of his relationship with Naledi and felt he should not mix business with pleasure.<sup>20</sup> The relationship was the subject of much discussion, with listeners split between a position that the relationship was “unprofessional” and could lead to “bribery and corruption”, and one which said that councillors “are also human beings” and that, as long as business and pleasure were separated, it was

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<sup>18</sup> In the group from Naledi Community Radio, men did seem to identify more strongly with the male characters, but this was the only instance in which it was noticeable.

<sup>19</sup> Here, as we have said, the Free State station groups were the most critical.

<sup>20</sup> The relationship was also criticised by the two groups run by Clacherty and Associates before the programmes were produced.

fine. Women were concerned that Grootboom might “take advantage of Naledi” or “use her”.

Big Boy, despite his “rehabilitation” during the series, was generally disapproved of. There was quite a lot of disapproval for the way he spoke not only to Matools, but also to his mother. He was labelled as “rude” and “disrespectful”. For the older people, he symbolised youth:

*One thing I learned from the series is that it showed the blind sight of the youth because BB was very ignorant. Here in the township, many people, especially the youth, hang around in the corners. Many are not concerned about what is happening in the society. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

In general, people were very clear about who was who and what each character represented for them (e.g. Naledi = strong woman who can take her life into her own hands; Grootboom = “good councillor”; Matools = “good refugee”; BB = disaffected, rude youth).<sup>21</sup>

It was clear that the series had **got people talking** about both characters and issues:

*I talked about it at municipality offices with some clerks and (a) councillor. (Naledi Community Radio)*

*We talked about it at church this Sunday. A young person wanted to know if I listen to it. (QwaQwa Radio)*

*We talk among us about them (the characters). (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*Yesterday I had the liberty of discussing local issues with my friends. We debated similar issues. We even referred to the series. We discussed certain points affecting our community and decided to write a letter to the civic association for help. We plan to involve other people with relevant resources so that we can contribute to the development of our community. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*My friend and I used to talk about the programmes. Of interest to us was communication with councillors. I was surprised to learn that he did not know who his councillor was and that he never voted in the previous local government elections because where I come from we had good relations with our councillor. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*For me, yes, I did talk to my friends because I remember saying that I thought councillors are people who get huge salaries and stay in*

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<sup>21</sup> In only one instance was there any confusion about who was who. In the Kangala focus group one participant muddled the two councillors and thought Msimang had been good: “he helped them until he died.”

*mansions. Now I know that we can make use of them to improve our community. They are the ones who should help us to improve our communities. (TNG)*

*We talked about it, discussed the different problems in our community and linked it to the series. We also discussed the things in the series that were right or wrong. (Kangala Community Services)*

It would certainly be a positive response if identification with the situations and people **led people to action** in their own situations, to following the model presented by Naledi and her friends. In most cases, respondents had not yet moved to action, although some were thinking of it:

*There's a group of us who want to take a matter up with the civic association so that we can run programmes for the youth in our community. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*We need to start up with projects for cleaning our community, but we do not have money to start such initiatives. ... This will be voluntary as we need not look for payment after working. It will be a good thing to volunteer at the schools, as we will be helping our children to go straight into learning rather than starting with cleaning classes.<sup>22</sup> (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*We need to volunteer and support our councillors. When we speak of municipality we speak of everyone in the community and not councillors alone. Everyone must participate to bring his or her community to a better condition for example removing scrap cars in the community as crime can occur in those places. (Naledi Community Radio)*

The understanding that one can help rebuild democracy without necessarily being a politician seemed to have been well understood:

*I sing in a band and I was happy to hear BB and friends able to raise funds to bury Busi. (Alx FM)*

*I am involved in the radio station to provide people with information that should help to improve their lives. (TNG)*

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<sup>22</sup> The issue of "volunteerism" was also raised at QwaQwa. In some instances, however, people seemed preoccupied with concerns about employment:

*I was motivated by this series but I wish I could find work and be able to do things for myself. (Alx FM)*

*All of us want to work, but it is so difficult. If I can find work, I want to open up my own business, a Spaza shop. (Alx FM)*

*Although I am not involved in politics, I am a member of a church group and we do a lot of things. Last week we had invited a nursing sister to address the youth about HIV/AIDS. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

Given the poor image of youth that people felt Big Boy presented, it was interesting to get feedback on **whether the series was one with which youth could identify** and one which “spoke to young people” in some way. A presenter who participated in one of the groups (Soshanguve Community Radio) said that they had found that many young people listened to the series and participated in the discussions (phone-ins) after each programme was broadcast. When the fieldworker asked why these young people had not been willing to come forward for the focus group, he said he thought it might be because they did not want to “go public” in their criticisms of local councillors and “whatever they said may be used against them in this focus group discussion”. At TNG there was a feeling that the music should have been more targeted to a youth audience if the producers wanted youth to listen:

*I don't think young people listened to it because the music was boring.*

*The music used in the series, just looking at the whole series itself, to put it on radio, I can say that out of ten young people, two or three listened.*

But others felt it went beyond the music and had more to do with the sorts of programmes young people listen to:

*When it comes to our youth they tend to think that those community problems, they are supposed to be addressed by older people.*

*They feel that politics is for the grey-haired.*

*I think the other thing that makes young people not to listen is that young people want something that meets part of their interest. For instance, when we want to initiate youth projects, we normally try to involve someone who is known, young and who will be a challenge. Someone like a role model.*

At Alx FM, people were concerned that, if the series was meant to get young people interested in democracy and local government, then it had been flighted at a bad time:

*I think the problem that might have caused young people not to listen to it is that it was flighted in the mornings when some youth are not available at home.*

One respondent from the Alx FM group felt that it was not enough to have a series like this on radio:

*You need to take another step. A series like this does not only have to be a script on radio only, but can be performed on stage at schools and youth centres.*

One young respondent (from the Barberton Community Radio group) said she thought it was important to get young people listening to these kinds of programmes:

*Young people must stop waiting for things to happen, they must make things happen. If we don't do anything now, by 2005 things will be worse.*

Several of the Barberton respondents were concerned that, while their parents had been militant, the young people were now alienated from politics and from history.

One of the young respondents from the Radio QwaQwa group felt that the programme had made a difference to her:

*A young person like me, I am here because I listened to it and because it helped me. In the near future I will be one of the councillors through the guidance of this programme.*

A number of the younger respondents referred to the fact that young people would be attracted by more appropriate music and that they "like entertainment".

The **music** evoked some mixed responses. Not surprisingly, some of the strongest criticism came from TNG where the suggestions were that "RNB, Kwaito, Hip-Hop" would have been a better choice for the music :

*I must honestly say that when you listen to the music I think maybe next time as a suggestion, when they record such programmes, they should look at the target audience of a specific radio station because I think the music in itself just as the programme is about to start it should also be able to accommodate young people if that particular station is accommodating youth. ... The music is not attractive especially to young people.*

Others did concede that others beside youth might want to listen and that the music "should be able to accommodate everybody", and one TNG respondent said:

*I just loved it (the music).*

Respondents from other groups were generally more positive about the music:

*I liked the music because they were rapping, the story was not boring, I enjoyed the music very much, the singing was also good but I prefer rapping. (Kangala Community Services)*

*The music was not boring. It was almost in line with the stories. You would feel the music and at the same time listen to the programmes. (Alx FM)*

*I liked the music because we could relate it to the drama. For instance, when it is time for Generations, we already know the music and identify*

*with it. The same thing happened with the series. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*It brought people together. ... It is for all the nations. ... I liked the sound but could not understand the music as it was in English. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*The music was good and attracting people to the drama. ... The music was rap type of music and people liked it. (QwaQwa Radio)*

*The lyrics were even sung by children on the street and they liked it. ... I have a younger sister who sings it repeatedly when she is playing alone. (Naledi Community Radio)*

In general, listeners found the series **entertaining**. They liked the format, even felt the episodes were too short (Naledi Community Radio) and, on the whole, felt that the acting was good:

*Yes, I could say the acting was good, because when I listened to the programme, I could imagine and see everything that is happening at Phaphamani. I could visualise Matoos, BB and Naledi and all that was happening there. The fact the programmes were in the form of a drama story made it easy to follow the messages in the various programmes. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*I think a story draws you nearer to reality like. When I am playing a part in a drama, people could easily relate to the character I am playing in the story, unlike in a context where I had to deliver a speech. With a story people find it easy to relate to the character. Even when they see you in real life, they still expect you to behave like that character.<sup>23</sup> This shows the impact of drama. It is usually taken to be true to life. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*For me, it is characters I wanted to listen to. (TNG)<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> Several respondents, across a number of groups, asked if it was not possible to use people from their communities as voices. In QwaQwa, where this had happened, people said “it worked really well and people understood the series better.”

<sup>24</sup> At Alx FM there were some criticisms that not all the episodes ended “powerfully”, and that they sometimes did not go deeply enough into the issues. At TNG there were criticisms about “reading from the script” and one respondent from there said:

*I believe that they should try and make the acting more flexible or free style.*

As on other issues, TNG respondents were generally critical about the drama format, saying “there was too much theatre in the series”, but, in fact, other responses indicated that they had enjoyed and engaged with the theatre. Some respondents from there were willing to admit it and said things such as:

*Dramatising the whole situation helps because we can relate to the people.*

*... with drama you can just relax and listen ... you never forget what happened...*

Some respondents were concerned that the drama format might confuse the messages by presenting too many issues and too many people, but one, a priest in the Barberton group, said:

*I'm speaking from my own experience as a priest. You come with a beautiful sermon, preach to people – if the sermon is dry and cannot be related to everyday experiences, people may not understand it. ... I like the way issues are being presented in a form of drama.*

Even when people had not listened to all the episodes (particularly true of the more urban groups), they had found those they had listened to entertaining, “you look forward to the next episodes”. (Kangala Community Services) Some of the TNG participants again raised their concern about targeting and felt that, to be really entertaining for youth, such a series would have to be specifically targeted. However, there were a number, even in the TNG group, who had clearly enjoyed the series and been entertained by it:

*I like the way in which the concept democracy was presented. Like I said, it is boring but the series made it very interesting. It was informative and educating in an entertaining way.*

The confluence of “informative” and “educating” was difficult for some people who didn't seem to be sure whether or not they *should* be entertained by something that was meant to be meant to be informative!

*Programmes like these build the nation. When we talk of entertainment we talk as if of playing. After listening to (this) series, you get direction because you are a better informed person. (Naledi Community Radio)*

At Mosupatsela, people almost seemed to feel they needed to make an excuse for finding the series entertaining:

*(They) are a form of recreation as we don't have recreation facilities here.*

Those who knew the term “edutainment” made this integration more easily.

*I learned a lot from the programme ... edutainment! (Kangala Community Services)*

Referring to the information aspect, several of the QwaQwa respondents felt that the series reflected good planning:

*In addition, it is well planned. We are left with two to three years to go and elect for the third time since the birth of the new democracy.<sup>25</sup>*

The fact that people identified with the stories and characters, and that they found the series entertaining, probably had much to do with the excellent levels of recall and retention that were demonstrated in the focus groups.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.2.4 Retention and recall**

We were concerned about retention and recall as evidenced in:

- ◆ General memories of the series – main themes, main characters, main storyline, music, jingles etc;
- ◆ Significant recall of episodes, characters and incidents;
- ◆ Significant recall of messages and information.

Our overall impression from the analysis of the focus group transcripts was that retention and recall at a general level had been excellent. So, for example, everyone remembered the opening incident when Busi drowns, most groups remembered the song “DEMOCRACY” (in one case a participant even sang it out in the group), and four out of eight were able to tell us what “Demos” meant<sup>27</sup>. There were very few confusions about the main characters and much detail in the recall of specific incidents.

*I remember one episode where the community did not know who their councillor is. They thought Grootboom was their councillor. The other thing I remember is where there was a fundraising activity where Matools tried to fix an electrical problem that occurred. Unfortunately, Big Boy was electrocuted<sup>28</sup> in the event. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*I remember when they were talking about relocating residents of an informal settlement to another place. (Alx FM)*

Perhaps most impressively, recall of the messages was also excellent and of the information good (see above):

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<sup>25</sup> This was in line with something that came up in the study done for ABC Ulwazi during 2001 when respondents noted the importance of programmes about democracy being run well in advance of elections, and on an ongoing basis, rather than only at election times.

<sup>26</sup>As did the fact that the focus groups were run so soon after actual flighting. But we noted, in relation to the process last year, that, despite the lapse in time since flighting, the one series that used the drama format was the one that listeners remembered the best.

<sup>27</sup>QwaQwa Radio does not seem to have included the term and this may also be true of the other Free State stations where some translation was done.

<sup>28</sup>He is saved by Matools who does CPR on him.

*I remember an episode where they indicated how we could use our councillors if we had problems, who to contact first and until our problems are solved. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*I think it was creating a relationship between councillors and members of the community, like are they able to talk when there are problems, are the people free to go to the councillors and tell them their problems and the councillors are they able to understand the problems of the community. (TNG)*

*The way I remember it, it was motivating, encouraging people not to sit and fold up arms, but to start doing something for ourselves, without being judgmental towards others. ... It (also) motivated me not to undermine other jobs because Matools made a living out of doing odd jobs. (Alx FM)*

*(It is about) the way in which communities are supposed to work hand in hand with their respective councillors. (Kangala Community Services)*

*The drama was about democracy, councillors, what they are expected to do and what we are expected to do. (QwaQwa Radio)*

We had a very strong sense from the focus group transcripts that the story format had aided the level of recall and retention, and that, in fact, people recall better when they are fed messages and information in small bites, linked to memorable events and people. Indeed, one of the respondents from TNG said:

*I liked it because everything was short. The drama wasn't too long and the interviews were also not very long. Everything was short. I hate concentrating for a long time. I don't think I am the only one who hates concentrating for a long time. There are many people who hate to concentrate for a long time.*

### **3.2.5 Response to programme producers and the stations**

Here we look at:

- ◆ the importance of community radio stations broadcasting such programmes;
- ◆ language issues;
- ◆ contextualisation;
- ◆ interaction between listeners and the stations.

All respondents felt **that community radio stations should broadcast such programmes**, because they ensure a better informed citizenry and help communities to solve problems.

*Yes, I think such programmes must be broadcast because I learned a lot of things which I did not know in the past. For instance, here in townships we have a lot of problems in our streets. We have problems*

*and the area is generally not safe. An incident like the one that happened at Phaphamani can easily happen here. We didn't know we can approach someone. Now we know. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*People need to understand what is democracy. In the series I heard one person saying that she's not going to bother to voting because local government is not delivering what they promised. This person is forgetting that she has a role to play within society as a community member . (Barberton Community Radio)*

*They need to broadcast so that the community could know what is happening around them ... we were able to meet our councillors through the information we received from our drama series through the radio. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*They need to broadcast dramas that are in line with our lives like poverty. ... Through our community radio, messages reach people quickly. (QwaQwa Radio)*

*Yes, they need to broadcast similar series like these. The stories and programmes need to be in line with the health conditions of the lives of the people they serve, like HIV/AIDS. (QwaQwa Radio)*

*Community radio stations inform people about issues people never heard in their lives and were never aware of. People learn through the radio. (Naledi Community Radio)*

**Language** was an issue for all the groups, although more so for rural groups than for urban ones. Some urban respondents would have liked "urban lingo" included. Even when it wasn't a problem for them, they thought it would be for some:

*For me, I know English as much as I know Venda. So basically for me it was not a problem. But thinking for an illiterate brother sitting in the corner right now playing dice, I think it is a problem because immediately when he hears English, he is completely turned off, thinking that it has nothing to do with him. To be honest, English is a bit difficult to most people in the townships. (TNG)*

There seems to be a general belief, certainly in the more urban areas, that most young people can cope with English but that older people often cannot:

*If they know that the programme is aimed at reaching the youth, then it is not a problem to flight it in English because the majority understands English. However, when the aim is to reach adults, then other languages should be used. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

In the urban areas, too, a number of people were comfortable with the kind of English used:

*It was simple and understandable. (TNG)*

TNG participants felt that if targeting were taken more seriously then the language issue would sort itself out because it would become clear when English was acceptable and when it was not.

Even in the urban areas, there were concerns that language would be a barrier:

*In my family, my parents and sister like listening to stories on Ikwekwezi FM because it is in a language that they understand. (Alx FM)*

In the more rural groups, English was very much a problem and, sometimes, not only English.

*The programme was OK, but it would be nice if they could consider the languages they're using – in Ekangala we speak Ndebele, a bit of seSotho and isiZulu, but otherwise it was OK. (Kangala Community Services)*

*I think the programme was well done and the acting. The only problem was the Sotho language. Here in Mpumalanga not a lot of people understand any of the Sotho languages.<sup>29</sup> (Barberton Community Radio)*

*English was a real huge problem. We could not understand the meaning of some words and we depended on our presenters who sometimes don't translate properly. We lose out – most information gets lost in the process of interpretation. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*It (English) was a huge problem because in the community older people do not understand English. Only two or three (few) people understood English and the rest do not know a thing about English. We have seven languages in this province and (on this) radio station. (Naledi Community Radio)*

The issue is not only to do with understanding but also to do with a level of pride about one's own language:

*The approach of the series was OK, (but) language is an important factor. We don't discriminate (against) other languages, (but) we want our language to be exposed. (Barberton Community Radio)*

Series 2 has already been done in English, isiZulu and seSotho. However, the language issue is a complex one in a multi-lingual country with so many official languages and may require a more sophisticated strategy than simply having programmes available in a few languages. The issue of targeting is important, but the answer may also lie in helping stations do what QwaQwa Radio seems to have

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<sup>29</sup> seSwati is the mostly commonly used language in this area which borders on Swaziland. Presumably isiZulu would work here.

done with some success – redoing programmes in local languages, using local “stars”.

ABC Ulwazi is committed to supporting the **contextualisation** of its programmes. The workshops run with presenters prior to the release of a series are meant largely to address this issue. The idea is to get stations to use the programme as a starting point for local discussions, with local experts, local leaders, local comment and so on. This might involve organising a panel discussion and/or a phone-in, going out in the field to get popular opinion, interviewing a prominent person, running some kind of competition, or any other creative technique. QwaQwa Radio re-recorded the whole of Series 1 in seSotho, using local people as the “voices”. This seems to have been very successful and people in the focus group commented on how good it was. In the workshop for Series 2, some attention was given to this strategy and perhaps it needs even more attention in future as a way of dealing with the language issue, and also of getting stations (and communities) to “own” programmes and be committed to them. The issue of training stations to produce their own “soapies”, preferably around local issues, needs to be looked at as well, where they have production facilities. Radio KC has already done work of this sort and it might be useful to do some kind of combined venture with KC to train stations in this.

Certainly, listeners seem to appreciate efforts to **contextualise** programmes.

*The station invited councillors to the station so as to participate in a discussion where people could raise issues that affect them. I was also one of those who participated in the programmes and competition. This was helpful because councillors were informed about the houses affected and were prepared to take the matter up. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*We would like to see the station do more of such programmes where listeners feel that the station is concerned about their welfare. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*The discussion programmes were conducted in a language that people feel comfortable with. They were free to address their problems in the dominant language in Soshanguve which is Tswana/Sotho. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*It is important for the series to be localised according to the area of broadcast, like involving people in that area. For Instance, if it is aimed at addressing people in Pretoria, then it should involve Pretorians so that they should relate easily to the characters. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

*Involvement of community in the series would serve many purposes - for them to relate, empowerment, participation. Even at the level of script writing. They could identify issues that are relevant to their needs. I know it may be a very expensive project, but because we want to reach a goal, then we have to research, get local people and empower them. (Soshanguve Community Radio)*

The TNG focus group participants felt that their station had not made an effort to contextualise or localise the series, and that the producers of the programmes had not had a target group such as theirs in mind when they made the programmes. In the Alx FM group, there were mixed feelings. Listeners felt some effort had been made to involve listeners on the issue of xenophobia, but that, in general, more could have been done on the other issues, and that there should have been more advertising of the series to get people to listen.

The QwaQwa respondents felt their station had done a “great job by organising the drama from the local people and we are proud to hear our voices on air in this drama and by translating it into seSotho in order to reach a large number of people. Local actors and local voices were used. Importantly, the station used people from the grassroots and not people with high education.” At Naledi Community Radio there had been a phone-in and people felt this was a good effort on the part of the station.

The issue of ***how the community interacts with a station*** continues to be problematic. In general, people do not see their role as being to engage with and make demands of the media. This cuts across the rural/urban divide<sup>30</sup>, and even in a station such as TNG, where listeners certainly had plenty of criticisms, they did not really see it as their role to tell these to the station.<sup>31</sup> Hopefully, this kind of audience reception study has a bonus side effect in encouraging listeners to voice their opinions and to understand that they are entitled to do so.

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<sup>30</sup> In fact, if anything, people in the more rural communities seem to feel more that they have a right to give their opinions to the station:

*I spoke to the presenter that such programmes should be flighted specifically for young people because they are the ones that are ignorant – I also suggested that this must be played during the programme “Speak up, young person”. (Kangala Community Services)*

*I personally spoke to the presenter about the language issue. We must emphasise the language issue. I reminded them that their license agreement was that 60% would be seSwati and the other percentage follow. They must maintain this. I asked them that in the next series they must first listen to the series before flighting them. (Barberton Community Radio)*

*We have power to advise the station and also to ask for community issues to be flighted through the station. We give the station staff support ... we need to guide them whenever they do wrong so that they can be stronger. (Mosupatsela FM Stereo)*

*We come and advise them. There are others who just write to the station when they advise the radio staff. (Naledi Community Radio)*

<sup>31</sup> There are, of course, some exceptions to this and some places where the situation is improving. So, for example, the fieldworker who went to Ekangala noted that the relationship between the station and the community seemed much stronger and less defensive than it had been when she visited there in the second half of 2001.



## **SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the above, we conclude that the series has, in fact, been well received by listeners in the sample areas assessed. Although the issues addressed were seen as being largely urban, they still had relevance for rural listeners. In the format in which it was presented, the people were interested in the topic and found it relevant, but the stations would have preferred more consultation around the choice of topic (in terms of prioritisation) and, to some degree, this was echoed by listeners.

In general, the messages and themes were well understood, and the overall message that effective democracy depends on the participation of ordinary citizens at a local level was accepted by all respondents. While it may be that the sub-theme around xenophobia was a little over-emphasised, it was seen as relevant by listeners from all the stations where focus groups were run. The NIMBY sub-theme was not as well understood as others and may need clearer development in subsequent series. The alienation of young people from the political system was recognised, but it might be useful to develop more positive youth role models in future or in other series, or, in Series 3, to emphasise the “rehabilitation” of Big Boy more.

The characters “worked”, both in terms of the messages they carried, but also in terms of evoking responses that showed that listeners “cared” about what happened to them, a significant factor in the success of soapies generally. Language was an issue and remains a difficult one in a multi-lingual country. There is a need for innovative responses to the challenges of dealing with this issue. It is not practical or financially feasible for ABC Ulwazi to produce programmes in all 11 languages, but more differentiation of target groups may make it feasible to select different languages and different language groupings for different programmes. Also, developing the skills of stations to produce their own dramas or to rework ABC Ulwazi products may be the most useful route to go in this regard. The work currently being done to train stations to contextualise products seems to be meeting with mixed success. Some effort is made by most stations, but this does not, in itself, substitute for the availability of products in local languages. There are also the issues of stations’ commitment to using local languages for a high percentage of what they broadcast, and of attracting local advertising and sponsorship. Use of local languages may be an important factor in getting local businesses to support programmes, particularly in rural areas. In general, stations are struggling with marketing and sponsorship and seem to need more help with this.

What does emerge from this audience reception impact study is that the drama format is a very powerful one and that it may well lead to clearer understanding of messages, greater identification, better information transfer, better recall, more engagement and more impact than other formats. While this may not be true for everyone, it does seem to be so for a sizeable proportion of the listenership. At the very least, the response from the focus groups suggests that it is a format that should be developed and exploited for community radio. The whole notion of “edutainment” needs to be better understood by stations and listeners. It seemed to

us that the role of music in edutainment needed more research on the part of ABC Ulwazi and again, here, conscious targeting may be required. Despite some criticisms, however, the music in Series 1 worked for many in the focus groups.

In general, we felt that the audience reception assessment process served a valuable purpose in encouraging listeners to voice their opinions about programmes. It is, however, an expensive process and it might be useful to consider training stations to run such focus group sessions themselves, in order to provide feedback to ABC Ulwazi in a more systematic and comprehensive way. Even if ABC Ulwazi paid stations to do this, it would be cheaper than sending out fieldworkers. Analysis could still be done centrally, either by ABC Ulwazi or someone else.<sup>32</sup>

## **4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

We are aware that ABC Ulwazi is constantly learning from its own processes and that our suggestions may already have been taken into account. However, we include them as ideas for consideration:

### **4.2.1 To do with Series 3**

- ◆ That the important role young people can play in building a culture of democracy in their communities be emphasised.
- ◆ That the sub-theme related to NIMBY be developed more.
- ◆ That some of the rural concerns be developed more.
- ◆ That the training prior to distribution focus on how to translate a series of this kind and on how to market it for local sponsorship and support.
- ◆ That a “spot” be developed (in several languages) to go with Series 3 in which reference is made to the input given by audiences through this assessment process.

### **4.2.2 In general**

- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi do more consultation with stations on prioritisation of topics for production of programmes.
- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi consider forming partnerships with stations to produce series of this kind.
- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi develop a training product around the production of drama series and “edutainment”, possibly in conjunction with a station such as Radio KC which has already produced a number of “soapies”.

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<sup>32</sup> Transcription would be the biggest problem but it would certainly be worth trying.

- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi do more research into music and the impact of music, as an aspect of dramas of this kind.
- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi develop a dedicated training product that focuses on how to “sell” topics and programmes related to topics, for local sponsorship and marketing to local advertisers. This should include some ability to research which topics are likely to get such support and being able to feed this information to ABC Ulwazi.
- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi develop a set of programmes with differentiated target groups e.g. some that have a specifically rural focus, or youth focus etc. This may require a more detailed analysis of licensed community radio stations in order to determine priorities, language preferences etc.
- ◆ That ABC Ulwazi continue with its attempts to do follow-up on the use of programmes distributed, possibly seeking specific information on when programmes are flighted. This requires systematic and repeated follow-up until comprehensive information is obtained.

**Nell and Shapiro cc  
April 2002**