

Campus Based Radio Stations As Agents of Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa: An evaluative study

Abstract

This study evaluates the impact of campus based radio stations as agents of social change in post-apartheid South Africa. While the activities of some selected campus based radio stations were briefly discussed for insight, this paper will use Radio Turf, a campus-based community radio station of the University of Limpopo, South Africa as a case study. To effectively have a clear understanding of the activities and impact of Radio Turf, focus group interviews were conducted among key category of listeners representing the various age groups to ascertain the views of the respondents about the Station's programmes and its impact on the communities.

Other vital issues that were critically evaluated include the level of community involvement in the running of the station as stipulated by the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (I.C.A.S.A). Critical social issues like programming, listenership and community involvement were also addressed by the respondents.

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Introduction

The general belief worldwide is that any campus based community radio station is a mere juke box. However, recent research studies have shown that some of these stations are actually contributing to community development. This paper briefly evaluates the impact of campus based community radio stations in community development in post-apartheid South Africa. Although some campus based radio stations in South Africa will be briefly discussed, the paper will focus on Radio Turf, the student radio of the University of Limpopo, using it as a case study. Through critical literature review, this study traces the history of early community radio initiatives, the various forms of community radio stations and the importance of community participation in the daily running of the station. It also examined the impact of some of the station's programmes on the listeners.

Building on the results of the surveys conducted, this paper critiques the concept and practice of participatory radio as underpinned in the works of Librero (1985) and Paolo Freire (1993) who looked at dialogic communication as a normative theory of participatory communication. The discussion evaluates how campus based radio stations, which is a form of participatory radio becomes a tool for knowledge generation and sharing towards local development planning and implementation. This discussion is enriched with materials obtained through focus group interviews that were conducted in three nearby communities as the listeners evaluated the station's programmes and its impact on the communities. Other vital issues that were critically evaluated include the level of community involvement in the running of the station as stipulated by Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (I.C.A.S.A).

Early community radio initiatives in South Africa

Media scholars, Steinberg (1995) and Johnson (2001) note that community radio stations were often established as a response to different kinds of struggle about social, economic or cultural issues. This is corroborated by Freire (1993) who notes and points to a strategy that involves traditional participants looking for ways and platforms to deliberate on issues that are of great importance to them. For instance, Radio Freedom, then the voice of the African National Congress (A.N.C) played a pivotal role in the fight against apartheid regime. In places where freedom of speech was restricted, community radio station was chosen as a way of giving a voice to the voiceless or those who were silenced and to help make information available (Wayande, 1996; Teer Tomaselli & De Villiers, 1998). Referring to the

concept of participatory radio, Freire (1993) observed that as people are allowed to participate in developmental processes and nation building, they will be able to seek for their liberation and empowerment.

At the Fifth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC 5) in Oaxtapec, Mexico in 1993, community radio was said to be a way of resistance, reinforcement and development of people's cultural identity (Teer - Tomaselli, 1995; Community Radio Manual, 1999). During the apartheid era in South Africa, a series of legislation placed limits on the operations of the media, which hindered the citizens from being well-informed (Stuart, 1980; Meyer, 1992; Ramaphosa, 1992; De Beer, 1993). However, South Africa's media were radically transformed by the political reforms that swept through the country in the late 80s and 1990s with deliberations held in Dakar and United Kingdom about the future of South Africa. The prominent one that sets the stage for the liberation of the South African media revolves round the resolutions reached by participants at the Jabulani Freedom of the Airwaves conference held in Amsterdam in 1991. The most fundamental changes that occurred were the gradual easing of government censorship and its abolition in the interim constitution. For example, deregulation in 1996 led to the proliferation of radio stations (De Beer, 1993; Teer-Tomaselli, 1995; Tettey, 2001; South Africa – Media).

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established in 1993 to issue licenses to community radio stations and the first community radio station to be licensed was Radio Maritzburg in December 1994 while Bush Radio was licensed in 1995 (Community Radio Manual, 1999, Fitzpatrick, 2003). The IBA was later replaced by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) in July 2000. Interestingly, the number of community radios has increased over the years.

The aims of community radio

Various research studies have been conducted over the years by media scholars to know what the aims of community radio stations should be. Media scholars like Sinha (1976), Ramaphosa (1992), Ziegler & Asante (1992), Freire (1993), Croteau & Hoynes (1997), Johnson (2001) Jankowski & Prehn (2002) and Fitzpatrick (2003) all observed that the aim of community radio is to serve particular communities, informing, educating and entertaining them. They also assert that community radio stations should

allow for active participation of the listeners in the radio stations with the aim of giving them the opportunity to identify their felt needs and offer solutions to various problems in the society. In addition, community radio stations must be available, accessible, acceptable, accountable and affordable to their listeners as discussed below:

- *Available* to community residents so that they can participate in the programmes, express their needs or discuss issues of interest relating to their own community
- *Accessible* so that community members can reach the station and benefit from it. It should be based within the community it is serving. Community members should have equal access to the station
- *Acceptable* to the people in the community and the station should cater for everybody in that community. It should be sensitive, and respect the languages, traditions, beliefs and cultures of that community
- *Accountable* by being answerable to the community it serves
- *Affordable* to the community as people should be allowed to contribute what they can afford to help sustain the station (Community Radio Manual, 1999).

Campus radio stations in perspective

Looking at the establishment of university or campus based community radio stations or student radios as the case may be, research showed that the idea first started in the U.S.A in the 1960s (College Radio Manual) and was soon to spread to Canada, Europe and then to Africa. Campus based (community) radio stations have since been established in several universities across South Africa. It must be noted that these student radios are a form of community radio station serving institutional communities like organisations, universities and colleges.

The IBA Act of 1993 and the Broadcasting Act of 1999 broadly define community radio, as a participatory, non-profit making community owned and controlled medium that should respond to the needs of its community and is accountable to community structures. This view is also highlighted by Librero (1985) who notes that people or listeners of a community (student) radio must be given platforms to “diagnose their problems and clarify their objectives so that they may be able to make wise decisions”. Student radios

should therefore be democratic by allowing everyone interested to participate in its running (Community Radio Manual, 1999). This means that members of the community or listeners take the development of their community into their hands when they involve themselves in the community radio (Steinberg, 1995; Teer – Tomaselli, 1995; Masilela, 1996; Servaes, 1996).

Radio Turf is also a community radio station saddled with responsibilities of fulfilling the above roles within the community (Constitution of Radio Turf, 1995; Radio Turf's Policy Document, 1999).

Campus based radio stations in South Africa

After its establishment in 1993, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) began to issue licenses to community radio stations in South Africa. Many student bodies in higher institutions across the country also made moves to establish radio stations on their campuses with aim of entertaining, informing and educating the university community. Another aim was to be able to contribute to the liberation struggle going on in South Africa at that time. Examples of campus based radio stations in South Africa are UNIVEN Radio at the University of Venda, Rhodes Music Radio at Rhodes University, Tuks *fm* at the University of Pretoria and Radio Turf at the University of Limpopo just to mention a few with the aim of serving the University and the neighbouring communities. Initially, one year trial licenses were issued to some of these institutions and later renewed for a four year period as subsequent applications for renewal were made (Fourie, 2001). Over the years, many campus based radio stations have been established in South Africa. For the purpose this paper, the activities of Rhodes Music Radio (Rhodes University) and Tuks *fm* (University of Pretoria) will be briefly discussed while the activities of Radio Turf (University of Limpopo) will be fairly discussed.

Rhodes Music Radio (RMR) – Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

The Rhodes Music Radio (RMR) station broadcasts on 89.7*fm* from Rhodes University in Grahamstown. The station has a very proud broadcast history as one of the pioneer within the radio industry in South Africa and broadcasts to the University and Grahamstown community in three languages namely English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans. The station's broadcast covers a 50km

radius of Grahamstown and has a diverse community encompassing university students, civil servants, professionals, scholars and the unemployed but with the primary target audience being students in Grahamstown. The station began narrowcasting to the Rhodes cafeteria on 1 August 1981 and later expanding to the residences on campus and was eventually issued with a temporary one-year community license in March 1995. A four-year broadcasting license was subsequently issued to the radio station and renewed over the years. RMR's programming also include talk shows, news, sports and other programmes aimed at bringing about development in the community (RMR: About Us).

TUKS *fm* – University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Tuks *fm* otherwise known as Radio Tuks was founded in 1980 and officially began to broadcast on 22 April 1981 to the cafeteria on campus. The station was also officially given a temporary one-year broadcasting license in 1995 with subsequent renewal of a four-year license over the years. Tuks *fm* now covers a remarkable geographical area in the Pretoria region, from Hammanskraal in the north, to Atteridgeville, Midrand and Kempton Park in the South. Spillover reaches as far as Warmbaths, Randburg, Krugersdorp and Pietersburg. The station broadcasts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from the heart of the University of Pretoria. The station also believes that community broadcasting should be focused on entertaining, educating and developing a community and this is ensured through its various social development programmes. It must be noted that these programmes have been well packaged to contribute meaningfully to community development. For example, one of the station's programmes called "Speaker's Corner" is a discussion programme covering topical issues such as poverty alleviation, economic issues and other topical issues that affects the community (Tuks *fm*: About us).

Radio Turf – University of Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa

Like other university based community radio stations, Radio Turf started to broadcast in 1980 as a juke box and it was the brainchild of the SRC. The aim of setting up the station was to entertain the University community and also to keep the students informed about happenings on campus as it affects the students and the University management. The station officially began its full operation as a community radio station in 1995 after being issued with a temporary one-year license by the then broadcasting regulator, the IBA and

the station broadcasts on 103.8fm band, covering a 97km radius around the University (Constitution of Radio Turf, 1995).

The station's Constitution states that the aim of the station is to promote the ideas, principles and roles of a community radio station. These roles entails that the station should operate as a not for gain and for non-profitable purposes. The station is also to operate with the support and participation of the community it serves. This also echoes the views of Librero (1985) and Freire (1993) that citizens are given platforms to individually and collectively speak their minds and address topical issues that affect them. Radio Turf for example broadcasts materials mainly of local origin and in local language and also promotes the participation of communities in the station's operations to ensure support of democracy, development and the empowerment of communities (Constitution of Radio Turf, 1995).

Evaluating Radio Turf programmes

In terms of programming and for the purpose of this paper, the following selected programmes of Radio Turf, which the station has carefully put together to meet the needs of its listeners and also ensure their development will be analysed and discussed. The programmes are:

(i) Morning Turf Update (6am – 9am):

This is a three hour programme aimed at updating listeners with latest news that bothers on the nation's economy, politics, business, education, weather update and other spheres of life.

(ii) Rethabile (9am – 12pm):

This is a talk show that focuses on health issues, interviews on issues affecting the community, women's issues and bits of information on latest happenings in the local, national and international arena. The aim of this programme is to keep listeners informed and if possible, engage them to phone in and debate some of these issues.

(iii) Lefelile (3pm – 6pm):

This is another programme aimed at keeping listeners informed about political, economic, developmental and social issues that affects the community. Sports update, gossips, interviews with prominent people in the community, traffic information and weather updates are also accommodated in this programme.

(iv) Sedibeng sa thuto (8pm – 9pm):

This is a pure educational programme aimed at discussing topical issues that affects the community in form interviews. This programme also offers lessons to teachers and students in some courses like Law, Economics, Management Sciences, Psychology, Social Work etc (Radio Turf's Programme Schedule, 2005).

Methodology

To effectively have a clear understanding of the activities and impact of Radio Turf and its various programmes, three focus group interviews were conducted among Radio Turf listeners in the surrounding communities of the University of Limpopo. The communities are Mamotintane, Boyne and Makanye. The interview sessions afforded the participants the opportunity to evaluate the Station's programmes and its impact on the communities. Below are the reports from the focus groups and the analysis of the data collected.

REPORT OF THE FIRST FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW- MAMOTINTANE

This focus group interview was held in the premises of Manthlane Trading Store in Mamotintane village opposite the Turfloop Campus of the University of Limpopo. The group consists of a cross section of Radio Turf listeners randomly selected from people that were relaxing within the Store premises. They were 9 female participants and comprised of 5 young adults and 4 adults. The researcher bore in mind the fact that an ideal focus group should consist of between 7 – 9 people that are homogeneous in nature. Effort was also made to control and effectively moderate the interview session. The participants were asked series of questions on listenership and programming of Radio Turf as analysed below:

Listenership

All the respondents (100%) indicated that they have regular access to radio sets and that they listen to Radio Turf. Majority of the respondents 7 (70%), stated that the station *educates, informs* and *entertains* them frequently and that they enjoy listening to Radio Turf, especially in the night. Another 20% reported that the station only meets their needs occasionally. These statistics and that of respondents that the station rarely meets their needs are presented in Figure 1 below:

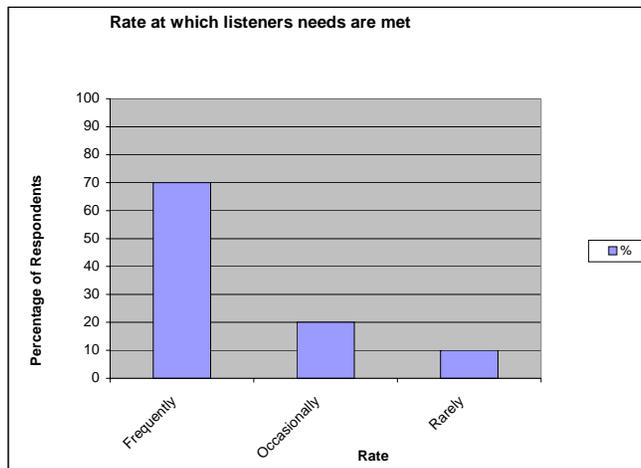


Figure 1: Rate at which listeners' needs are met (Mamotintane)

Needs met by Radio Turf

The participants were then asked to mention which of their needs Radio Turf meets most.

Most of the respondents (70%) were of the opinion that the station meets their educational needs most, 20% said that the station meets their informational needs most as analysed below in Fig.2

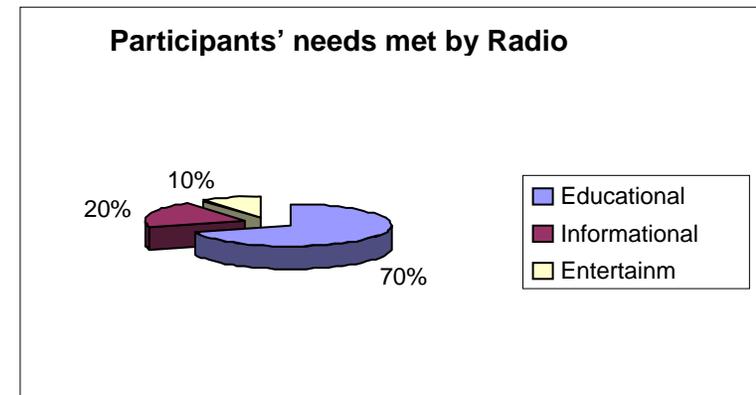


Figure 2: Participants' needs met by Radio Turf (Mamotintane)

The participants were of the view that the station's programme such as Morning Turf Update, Rethabile, Lefelile and Sedibeng Sa Thuto, which were earlier on discussed do contribute tremendously to knowledge sharing as the listeners are given the opportunity to suggest solutions to issues that affect the communities as noted by Librero (1985). They are also able to make use of appropriate platforms provided by these programmes to critically analyse government policies and make their views known to the authority.

Programming

On the issue of programming, all the respondents (100%) were of the opinion that the station covers local events in the community. They also stressed that the Station addresses moral and vital developmental issues in the community. They (100%) however observed that the Station needs to give more opportunity to the listeners to contribute or make suggestions with regards to type of programmes to be on air. They (100%) concluded that the station's social development programmes do have impact on them.

REPORT OF THE SECOND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW – BOYNE

This focus group was held at Boyne Taxi rank, which is about 30 kilometres from the University. It consists of a cross section of eight (8) drivers at the

Taxi rank that were waiting to fill up their vehicles and they are Radio Turf listeners. Four (4) of them were adults and the remaining four (4) were fairly old men. Like the first group, they were also asked series of questions on listenership and programming of the station. Interestingly, the answers given by this group were similar to the ones given by the first group. Their responses are analysed below.

Listenership

All the participants (100%) stated that they have regular access to radio sets and that they enjoy listening to Radio Turf. The participants were asked to comment on how often the Station meets their needs and majority of the respondents (60%) confirmed that the station meets their needs frequently and that they enjoy listening to Radio Turf. Another 35% of the participants reported that the station meets their needs occasionally. This and the other views of the respondents are presented in Figure 3 below:

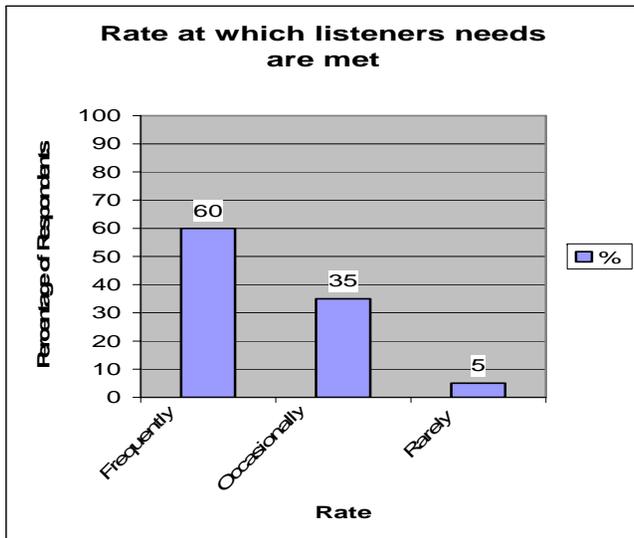


Figure 3: Rate at which listeners’ needs are met (Boyne)

Needs met by Radio Turf

When asked to mention which of their needs Radio Turf meets most, 55% of the respondents were of the opinion that the station informs them most. The

detailed statistics of other responses given by the respondents are given in Figure 4 below:

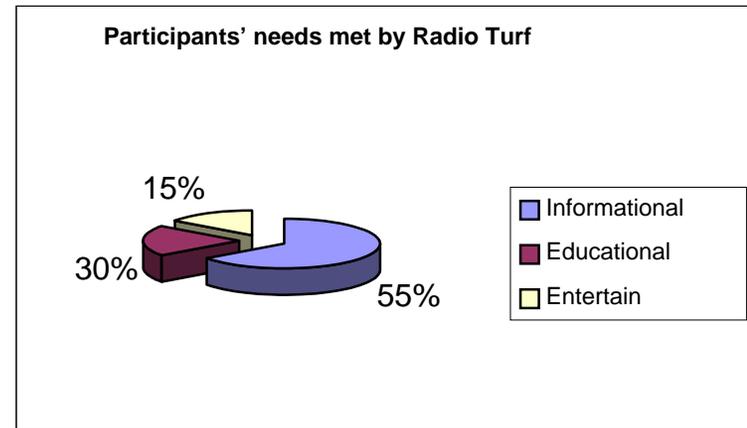


Figure 4: Participants’ needs met by Radio Turf (Boyne)

Programming

Participants in this group were also asked questions to know their views about the Stations’ programmes and its impact on the listeners. All the respondents (100%) were of the opinion that the station covers local events in the community. They were also of the opinion that the Station addresses moral and vital developmental issues, which affect their community. They also stress the need for continuous interaction between Radio Turf and its listeners in their community towards getting them involved in the Station’s activities or get their inputs. The participants believed that the Station’s social development programmes do have impact on them leading to behavioural changes in many areas of their lives. They concluded that the station is doing its best to entertain the listeners as well as informing and educating them.

REPORT OF THE THIRD FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW – MAKANYE

This focus group was held in the premises of a Spaza shop in Makanye, which is about 10 kilometres from the University. This focus group consists of a cross section of Radio Turf listeners that were mainly High School students who saw the Spaza shop as a place of relaxation as they were on

holiday. The eight (8) male participants were randomly selected and they were excited and willing to participate as they saw the exercise like a radio interview. Like the two previous groups, these participants were also asked series of questions ranging on listenership and programming. Below are the responses given by the participants:

Listenership

On the issue of access to radio sets, all the respondents (100%) stated that they have regular access to radio sets and that they listen to Radio Turf regularly. All the respondents (100%) said that they listen to Radio Turf regularly early in the morning before going to school in order to update themselves with the latest news making headlines. They also confirmed that they listen to Radio Turf regularly in the night too. Majority of the respondents (75%) confirmed that the station is meeting their needs frequently and that they enjoy listening to Radio Turf. This and the other responses are presented in Figure 5 below:

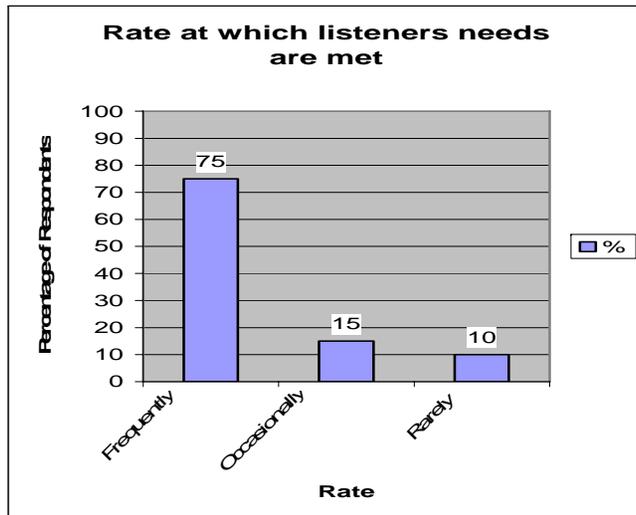


Figure 5: Rate at which listeners’ needs are met (Makanye)

Needs met by Radio Turf

Most of the participants (50%) were of the opinion that the station meets their educational needs most while 30% said that the station meets their

informational needs most. This and the other response by the participants are presented in Figure 6 below:

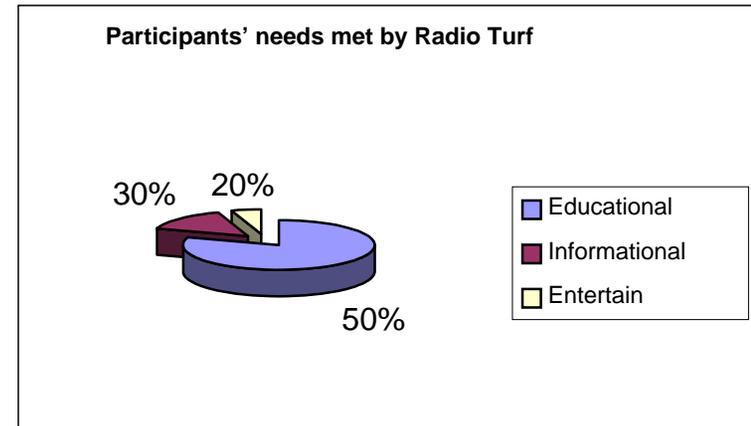


Figure 6: Participants’ needs met by Radio Turf (Makanye)

Programming

On the issue of programming, all the respondents (100%) were of the opinion that Radio Turf regularly covers local events in the community. They also observed that the Station addresses developmental and moral issues through its various programmes. This group of students however pointed out that the Station needs to give them opportunities to give inputs or make suggestions with regards to the type of programmes to be on air. On the issue of community participation, all the respondents (100%) said that the station should involve the listeners when structuring its various programmes so that topical issues affecting the society will be well addressed.

Importance of community participation in the community radio station

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in one of its publications titled “The People’s Voice” (2004) stressed that community participation should not be an isolated meeting but a process where everybody gets together to hear and discuss an idea or proposal that will benefit the whole community and bring about development. It should be an on-going interaction between the radio station and the community. This ensures that

the community radio station is really the voice of that community, representing and clearly putting forward the needs, wants, concerns, feelings and prioritised issues of the people in the area.

Stations should however not assume that because they have strong support of their listeners, no further effort is needed to ensure participation. Listeners should therefore be continuously involved in all aspects of the station (Olorunnisola, 2000; Community Radio Manual, 1999; HSRC, 2004). This will give them the opportunity to suggest programmes and ways of addressing issues that affect them. It will also allow them to participate in developmental processes and nation building as fresh ideas that will be beneficial to all will be brought to light. These views are also supported by MacBride (1980), Librero (1985), Servaes (1996) and Freire (1993). They also believed giving such platforms and opportunities to people will allow them to participate in the task of transforming the society and also help them to seek for their liberation and empowerment. It must be noted that campus based radio stations like Radio Turf, Rhodes Music Radio and Tuks *fm* have been giving such opportunities to their listeners to contribute to developmental processes in their communities.

Concluding Remarks

Fourie (2001) states that for a community radio station to serve its listeners effectively, it must be able to have a clear understanding of the social stratification of the community. This will in turn help the station to be able to cater for all the various interest groups from the children to the elderly through its programmes. Campus based radio stations like other community radio stations have therefore been using well packaged programmes to inform, educate and also entertain their listeners, giving them platforms to contribute meaningfully to community and national development. Looking at Radio Turf's selected programmes as analysed above, it must be noted the station's programmes are well compiled to ensure that the station fulfils its mandate to entertain, educate and inform its listeners leading to social change and development in the various communities. The reports / findings of the focus groups conducted with various groups of listeners clearly showed that the station's social development programmes do have impact on the listeners.

However, it's important for the station to ensure continuous community participation to be able to know the needs of the community and integrate these needs into its programming so that topical developmental issues will be well tackled. Various communication researchers have over the years

stressed that the key words in the successful operations of any community radio station are community involvement and participation, taking inputs from the community (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2003; HSRC, 2004). It is therefore the responsibility of any community radio station to ensure that the needs of its listeners are well accommodated in its programmes to ensure proper development.

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