

# Ushering in democracy

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tion, delegates drew up a series of resolutions and a draft a code of conduct.

The resolutions included:

- all members shall accept and practise the principle of political tolerance;
- all members have the right to constructive criticism;
- all people and organisations shall be afforded the right to assembly;
- the right to own property shall be guaranteed;
- the right to life shall be guaranteed;
- all organisations are to have free access to media and amenities without hindrance;
- discipline is to be exercised by the respective executive committees of the transgressors;
- the system of hereditary rules is to be observed and respected;
- agreements made at national level by both organisations need to filter down to the grassroots, and this should be the responsibility of both organisations;
- the IYP should not monopolise KwaNdebele state resources because state resources belong to all the people of KwaNdebele;
- the civil service must be separated from politics;
- there must be a clear distinction between IYP and the KwaNdebele government;
- since the IYP has influence in the government it should support other community organisations which have genuine problems with the government; and
- communication channels to be created at all levels through the secretary-general in order to resolve problems.

It was agreed unanimously that a joint report-back meeting to members in the region be organised, and the secretaries general of both organisations were mandated to form a regional liaison committee.

A liaison committee was appointed with the task of ensuring the implementation of the resolutions and code of conduct.

Elements of the code of conduct included the freedom to organise and canvass support; the right to free assembly and equal access to venues; freedom of expression (including access to the media and the right to positive criticism);

and a commitment to the protection of lives and property.

This new deal entrenching peace and tolerance in KwaNdebele has already begun to give rise to other events.

The IYP and ANC are now looking to a bright future where they will be organising joint political education programmes such as voter education, and the message will be filtered through to grassroots membership.

Ronnie Mamoepa, ANC regional publicity secretary, said the conference deserved praise since it had served as a 'pace setter' for promoting a culture of democracy in our country.

**Paul Zondo is a regional co-ordinator in Idasa's Pretoria office.**



UN observer Antonio Cubeiro with Idasa's Braam Viljoen at the workshop.

# Have you seen them? What do they mean?

The SABC seeks a way of changing the world while changing itself.

By SUE VALENTINE

**Y**ES, what do they mean? Those brief adverts on television with South Africans of varying shades of pigment and political belief, airing their views on liberty, equality, the economy and a host of other 'popular' concerns.

Reaction to the 'People Say' campaign, produced by advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi for the SABC, is varied. Some regard it as an SABC image-building effort, others see it as an attempt to encourage debate and build tolerance in a divided society.

Both perceptions are correct. In recent years the SABC has been at pains to polish its tarnished image - hiring consultants to advise it on how best to tell the world it is changing, at the same time as attempting to fulfil its role as public broadcaster.

Certainly the initiative to air a diversity of viewpoints and to promote public debate is encouraging. No matter how long it has been in coming, the use of the national airwaves to attempt to foster understanding and tolerance is a welcome development.

What exactly is being done *inside* the corporation to encourage a climate of tolerance, independent investigative and credible journalism remains shrouded in defensive secrecy. Besides the public relations exercises, there's been little attempt by the SABC to



Ruth Tomaselli: audience in the dark

## What other

Gavin Stewart, professor of journalism, Rhodes University

'The ads do seem to raise people's awareness of each other, but I'm a bit bewildered at the people they're choosing... They seem to be taking fairly far-out views to the left and the right and I'm not sure what this actually achieves.

'It reminds me of the Archie Bunker series in the United States which was intended to ridicule bigotry, but had

Abantu VANHU  
bathi VARI  
Batho ba re  
People say  
Vhathu vha ri  
BANTU BATSI



'People Say' regular: Hilda Grobler, writer and DP election candidate in Durban

expose its inner workings and guiding principles to public scrutiny.

The co-ordinator of the 'People Say' project is the SABC's assistant executive editor of TNP (Television News Productions), André le Roux, who said the series arose from a desire within the corporation to address the soaring levels of intolerance prevalent in South African society.

In the face of these good intentions it might appear cynical to rehash the SABC's track record. However, while people and institutions must be allowed (and encouraged) to change, it would be naive not to remark on the irony in the SABC's hiring of an advertising agency to redress the ignorance and intolerance it allowed to develop – and helped to create – through segregated stations and programming, and politically determined news coverage and comment over the past 40 years.

At the same time, however, the need for a climate in which political differences are tolerated and political debate and even political competition can flourish is essential, and all efforts that genuinely support this objective are to be encouraged.

So what does the SABC's fledgling initiative hope to achieve and how? The aim, says Le Roux, is to expose South Africans to the different points of view held by fellow citizens. The corporation commissioned an independent research survey and used the findings to inform the campaign.

One of the most resounding messages

from the survey, says Le Roux, was the almost total lack of tolerance throughout South African society. Although many paid lip service to the concept, the right of others to hold other viewpoints and to act upon them evoked a very different response. According to the findings, only a tiny minority (two percent) of South Africans could live with and understand the concept of democratisation.

The first attempt – a series of interviews with various individuals on the subject of tolerance – was never flighted and the project was sent back to the Saatchi & Saatchi drawing board. Just how much this cost the SABC (and taxpayers) no one is saying, but 'it cost us money', concedes Le Roux.

The second phase involved a 'fairly random' selection of ordinary, but articulate, South Africans, who took part in lengthy interviews, often conducted in an argumentative style on a range of subjects. This done, various sound bytes were cut out of each interview and compiled to represent a range of opinions around certain themes. The result is there for all to see on TV1 and CCV-TV three or four times a day.

As yet there has been virtually no public response to the 'People Say' spots. According to Le Roux, the only phone calls to the SABC have been 'mainly from right wing people who have reacted in a very intolerant mode'. In most cases callers have reacted to certain views put forward or against the presence of black people. A common line, says Le Roux, has been: 'what is this, is it communist inspired?'

As far as he is aware, there have been no inquiries or comments from black viewers. The general silence is puzzling.

'We don't know what this lack of response means,' says Le Roux. 'Either the ads are meaningless and not effective or people have been taking them in their stride... From informal chats I've had it seems people are discussing them and they do identify with one or other of the faces.'

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## (media) people say....

quite the opposite effect.

'I can't see how these ads will do much more than reinforce people's positions, there is not enough length or depth to do anything. The intention is marvellous, but I think the effect is minimal.'

Ruth Tomaselli, lecturer, Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal

'I don't know how this kind of selection can ever be a legitimate exercise. The audience doesn't know the context or the questions being asked... The range of opinions are manipulated: none of them are

weighted in terms of the number of people who might hold such opinions.

'The assumption that is implied in these adverts is that this is a genuine vox pop. It purports to show unsolicited opinions, but we are left asking who is this and why are they doing it? The makers of the programmes never reveal themselves.'

Jane Argall, co-ordinator, Ecumenical Resource Centre, Durban

'My impression is that not many people are watch-

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Gavin Stewart: effect minimal

# Have you seen them?

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'We also don't know if perhaps there isn't an irritation factor creeping in - we've been flighting the spots a maximum of three or four times per day, per channel.'

Some of these questions will be answered by qualitative and quantitative audience research surveys which are about to be undertaken by Auckland Park's research department. It is hoped that by the end of March, at least some light would have been shed on what South Africans think of 'People Say'.

Planning and research director at Saatchi & Saatchi, Sandra Fisher, says some of the informal feedback she has received indicated that while people found the adverts interesting, they did not know what to do with the information.

'Our main problem has been how to take it a bit further. The aim is to help people understand each other better and to break down stereotypes,' she said.

This concern has prompted a recent adaptation to the ads with the message 'Listen...Talk...For understanding...For a better future' rolling up on the screen at the end of each spot.

Whether or not they will enhance the impact of the ads remains to be seen. Also unknown is the cost-benefit ratio of the project.

**'We haven't even had inquiries from the media - either official or unofficial'**

One of Le Roux's early concerns was that the ads might provoke a reaction similar to the outcry against the use of R4,3m of taxpayers' money for the notorious 'Info song' in 1986/87. But public response has been lethargic, to say the least. 'We haven't even had inquiries from the media - either official or unofficial,' he adds.

Saatchi & Saatchi and Le Roux both declined to say how much this campaign has cost. According to Fisher the adverts that have been aired thus far constitute phase one of a long term strategy presented to the SABC by the agency.

'Obviously we're not doing this for free, but it is a special situation which we're negotiating with the SABC,' said Fisher.

According to her the project is part of an initiative to improve the SABC's image - but to do so through the corporation making a positive contribution and fulfilling its role as a public broadcaster.

Thus an additional concern of Le Roux's is the need to see whether or not 'we are getting any mileage out of this or do we regard it simply as an exercise in exposing people to each other'.

The answer to this question will indeed depend on what the people say.

Sue Valentine is Media Director

# What other people say

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ing the ads with care and interest because not many people know what they are aiming to achieve.

The concept is a good one: to use sound-bites to allow voices from below to speak. But the SABC should apply itself more fully to this project. It needs to commit itself to reporting fully, to establishing credible principles of selection of the interviewees, and to explaining the intentions of the idea to the viewing audience.

'Channel 4 in Britain once carried a series of programmes called Talk Back in which a space was cleared for anyone at all to say anything for a few minutes without any editorial intervention. The only exclusion I believe, was of party political statements. It seemed to work. Viewers knew they had access to that space too. Perhaps it is an example which could be looked at more carefully.'

Larry Strelitz & Lynette Steenveld, Journalism lecturers, Rhodes University

'Clearly the vox pops have been edited to bring together contrasting views. The underlying intention of these inserts is to air a multiplicity of South African views about South Africa, the presumed aim being to promote the idea of dialogue.

'One must assume that the assumption behind this is that the process encourages political tolerance.

This is a liberal conception of the way in which ideologies are formed. A materialist analysis of ideological formation is that ideas are rooted in material circumstances and one would therefore argue that such a programme would have minimal effect.

'These programmes in fact tell us more about the SABC than about the outside world. The SABC has shifted its position and is now in the business of consensus forming.'

# Mixing

**Do we still need public service broadcasting? And if so, how should it be constructed? RUTH TOMASELLI addressed these issues at a recent Idasa seminar. This is an edited version of her paper.**

IT IS a truism that broadcasting in South Africa is on the verge of the most profound transformation since the start of the radio service in 1924.

Discussions on broadcasting policy have centred on the establishment of regulatory mechanisms and structure, particularly the composition and appointment of a new governing board. So loud has been debate around these issues, that it has drowned out dialogue of what content could or should be. And content is more than just news and current affairs programmes.

We need strategies for ensuring that culturally valuable content will be a priority in the near and mid-term future. To avoid the repetition of past mistakes, a programming policy must be put in place that is able to survive the period of transformation within the SABC.

While the audience's desire for commercial television should be fulfilled, policy should realise the goal shared by both proponents of public service and market/commercial broadcasters - the extension of the notion of freedom and cultural expression. This means both the negative freedom from restrictive legislation, censorship and discriminatory licensing provisions, and the positive freedoms of citizens and communities able to express themselves, and receive broadcasting which fulfills their needs.

To ensure both, a mixed system, consisting of market and public service broadcasting (PSB), is required.

Somewhat cynically, Australian Michael Tracey suggests that while in PSB, producers acquire money to make programmes, in a commercial system they make programmes to acquire money. In a more positive vein, he suggests that PSB should be structured to encourage competition in good programming, rather than competition for numbers, and that PSB has a deep commitment at all levels to the education and cultural expression of the public - the audience-as-citizen.

Traditionally, PSB fulfills the Reithian exhortation to 'educate, inform and entertain'. The traditional Reithian characteristics