

Community radio sector under spotlight at indaba

Government is concerned about the "wobbly" community radio sector, says Communications Minister Dina Pule.



(Image: GCIS)

Speaking at the Community Radio Governance Indaba in Polokwane on Thursday, the minister said if problems that existed in the sector continued, the communities that these stations were intended to serve would be adversely affected.

The community radio sector was "close to the heart of the South African government", which had made enormous investments in it.

This included the huge community support programme in the Department of Communications, as well as the establishment of two entities dedicated to support the sector - the Media Diversity and Development Agency and the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa.

"Comparatively, our community radio support as government, (both direct and indirect), remains unrivalled in the world, including in first world economies," she noted.

However, despite this massive investment the sector was "as wobbly as ever".

"Board members and station managers continue to bicker; funds invested in the stations are not accounted for; and the communities which the stations are intended to serve are never informed about the stations' activities, be it financial and/or otherwise," Pule said.

The collapse of a corporate governance culture in the sector, which motivated the hosting of the conference, was a major concern.

She stressed that the community radio sector existed to serve the communities.

The minister questioned what station managers had done to inform and educate communities on issues such as the xenophobic attacks and service delivery protests or to reflect on occasions of national importance such as Women's Month and Heritage Month.

"Good governance, which is a prerequisite for the success of community radio stations, is missing," she cautioned.

Pule said her department was eager to discuss these issues with those at the conference.

These communities rely heavily on these stations for their education, information and entertainment needs, she added.

The department would continue to support the sector, despite the challenges.

"We have learnt that financial support alone cannot sustain the sector. It has to be anchored in a strong corporate governance culture evidenced through strict adherence to policy mandate and reporting and accounting to our communities at all time," Pule said.

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