

Digital deadline concerns community radios

By [Richard Lee](#)

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A major continental conference on community radio stations ended last week in Maputo with a clear warning - the '2015 deadline for digital migration set by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is approaching and little debate is taking place about how it will affect the allocation of frequencies for the community broadcasting sector'.

Bringing together 200 participants - including representatives from community radio stations, academia, civil society organisations, regulatory authorities and media support organisations - from 20 African countries, the conference took a critical look at the state of community radio stations across Africa.

"This conference was a timely intervention that enabled participants to interrogate some of the critical questions about sustainability, funding and financing models, content production, and the role of the state in supporting community radio stations, among other issues, to ensure that the rural and marginalised communities in our region have a voice," said Dr Dumisani Moyo, Media and ICTs Programme Manager at the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), which was one of the main funders of the conference. "OSISA is committed to working with other interested partners to ensure a vibrant community radio sector in our region and beyond."

Along with the key concern about the fast-approaching ITU digital deadline, the final communique of the conference also called on 'African States and civil society actors to preserve national and international mechanisms that support cultural diversity and freedom of expression. This involves the principle of controlling the allocation of frequencies to private business and ensuring regulation in the public interest to guarantee cultural diversity and freedom of expression'.

The conference also urged 'African governments to put in place legislative and conducive regulatory frameworks, which institute a three tier system with appropriate access to the frequencies for all communities, including the most marginalised, and to strengthen independent regulatory bodies able to guarantee the Right to Communicate and Access to Information'.

In addition, the final communique specifically singled out the governments of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Morocco Libya and Mauritania and requested them to 'establish legal provisions for licensing community broadcasting in the respective countries'.

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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