

SABC seeks its own Simunye



The public broadcaster highlighted its progress and problems in transformation in its submission to the Human Rights Commission Inquiry, as the following excerpts record ...

The transformation of the human resource profile of the SABC was one of the key challenges which faced the Board that was elected in 1993.

Today, in the News Division top management is 100% African, with senior management being 80% African and 20% Indian. In a departure from the overall trend within the SABC, the middle management in the news department is 56% black and 44% white. Of the black percentage, Africans constitute 49%. Whites however still dominate the junior management and specialist personnel within the news department, making up 53% with 41% African staff.

Prof Dumisani Hlope, drafted a questionnaire which was circulated to all SABC employees at the head office and regions. Sixty five of these were returned completed. Of these 65 only three were completed by white employees, two anonymously. Though the sample is small it gives some indication of the extent to which employees have integrated and the interpersonal relationships between black and white employees.

The consultants also conducted interviews — which tended to confirm the views in the survey.

The attitudes of both black and white employees broadly reflect the tensions, misperceptions and insecurities of the larger South African society. The only two white respondents stated that affirmative action amounted to discrimination against whites, and argued that the manner in which it was being implemented resulted in undeserving persons being placed in senior positions simply because they were black.

Other white employees interviewed by the consultants did not express strong views on affirmative action directly, but rather raised what they perceived to be reasons for this slow pace. The heads of those departments that remain predominantly white acknowledged that this was a problem, but blamed this on the lack of technical skills amongst black employees. They also indicated that certain programmes were put in place to change the situation.

African people interviewed on the other hand felt that racism was rife within the SABC and that black employees, even senior ones, were being discriminated against. They felt that white SABC employees from the past were still entrenched in certain departments and were determined to keep black employees out under various guises. They cited amongst other incidents of discrimination the following:

- ▶ being overlooked for promotion
- ▶ being "trapped" or "set up"
- ▶ insensitive racial comments being made in the presence of Africans
- ▶ the use of disciplinary proceedings to get rid of black people

In response to the question "how would you categorise interpersonal relationships among different racial groups within the SABC?", 40% of the respondents termed them poor, 26% said they were satisfactory, 3% said they were good and 2% said they were excellent.

While the interpersonal relationships between black and white within the SABC have improved substantially from what they were in 1993 and 1994, pockets of tension still remain, as evidenced by the results of the survey.

The interracial problems however do not only stem from those white employees who were with the SABC prior to 1993, but also from white employees, some liberal, who came in after 1994.

The SABC acknowledges that getting the numbers right is only one part of transformation. The other very important part is creating the right conditions and work environment that will allow black employees to reach their potential within the SABC.

This transition period is one of the most difficult and it is recognised that the right support structures need to be put in place so that both black and white employees can feel at home within the SABC and contribute to making it the dynamic media organisation that it can be.

RADIO AND RACIAL RESOURCES

In interviews with the SABC's consultants, several employees raised the issue of language and the use of English language as the main language of the bulletins.

The predominantly black editorial team is sensitive to these concerns. While journalists are still required to write stories in English, which are then edited and translated, this is more of a practical measure than a desire to elevate English and neglect African languages.

SABC has 19 radio stations within and the editorial team believes that it is essential that the same news is broadcast — unlike in the past where there was "white" news and "black" news. If stories are filed only in particular African languages it may not be easy to include them on other African language stations or non-African language stations such as English and Afrikaans.

Another problem is the inequality around allocation of resources to stage programmes geared at black and white audiences. SAFM caters for English-speaking whites mainly and has a listenership 423 000. Ukhozi FM, the Zulu language station has a listenership of 5 990 000.

Yet for the 1999/2000 financial year Ukhozi's budget is only 38% of SAFM's. This figure excludes the amount spent on the SABC/BBC Co-Production which would double the annual budget of SAFM.

The Afrikaans station, Radio Sonder Grense, has a listenership of 1 552 000 as opposed to Lesedi FM which is SeSotho and has a listenership of 3 493 000. Yet Lesedi has the same budget as RSG.

SABC'S HUMAN RESOURCE PROFILE

Level	June 1993				January 2000			
	African	White	Coloured	Indian	African	White	Coloured	Indian
Top management	0%	100%	0%	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%
Middle management	0,1%	90%	0%	1%	35%	59%	2%	3%
Jnr mgmt & specialists	14%	85%	0,2%	0,2%	33%	62%	2%	3%
Supervisory level	20%	78%	0%	0%	38%	55%	4%	4%
Rest of staff	34%	29%	0%	0%	59%	29%	0%	0%

At present the News Division has 314 reporters of whom 219 are black, which constitutes 70%.

The editorial team is predominantly African and this has had a major impact on not only the type of stories that are being carried by the SABC, but also the manner in which those dealing with issues such as affirmative action and economic empowerment are handled.

The news division has given attention to bringing in more African and other black commentators. It has employed a news researcher, Boitumelo Mofokeng, to coordinate analysts and experts and to ensure that African expertise is utilised and their perspectives heard on matters of public importance.

At present the SABC has a workforce which is approximately 50% black. This achievement has not been reproduced elsewhere in media institutions. There are still, however, a myriad problems that continue to hamper transformation in the SABC.

While top and senior management are committed to transformation, middle management which is predominantly white and in control of the day-to-day operations of the SABC, does not have same degree of commitment. In many instances there is active resistance to transformation. While sound policies are therefore drawn to implement changes, these policies are not always implemented by middle management and often not followed up by senior management.

SABC's consultants, attorney Christine Qunta and