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The interaction between Khwezi community radio, transformative power and social change in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Khumalo, Sibonile Linda

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Abstract

The research contributes to the discourse on participatory development communication through responding to the primary question: *How does community radio as a participatory medium of development communication contribute to social change?* Through their participatory means, community radios (CRs) empower communities to move away from imposed developmental solutions towards attaining individual and collaborative empowerment to tackle their community challenges. The thesis examined rural communities who actively listen to Khwezi community radio to obtain a broad understanding of the crucial roles that CRs plays in enhancing social change through a multiple embedded case study. The researcher collected data through qualitative methods, i.e., face to face interviews, focus group discussions, observations, systematically listening to development programming on Khwezi radio, and documents analyses. These were conducted with community members (listeners of Khwezi radio), radio staff, key station partners and community leaders.

The study found that CRs contribute to facilitating individual and community level social change in various ways. Individual level change included behavioural change and spiritual upliftment. It further established a strong sense of community fostering social cohesion in *Masibumbane* listeners club which consists of Khwezi's active listeners. This sense of community enabled communities to address their societal challenges collectively. The study also illustrated the critical role that the community radio plays for listenership communities in facilitating the accountability of community leaders to citizens, service delivery and other development-related projects. The study contributes a unique understanding of the role played by community radio in fostering the transformative power of communities resulting in their active contribution to social change initiatives. It further highlights the significance of organic spaces of participation in fostering collaborative empowerment for communities to manoeuvre power contestations as active agents of social change. The thesis concludes on the need for multifaceted support to CRs development roles as transformative agents facilitating social change within a broader ecosystem.