

Speaking notes

National Assembly

12 July 2024

M Mrara ANC (MP)

Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies

Budget Vote Debate: Budget Vote 4 (GCIS)

[6 Minutes]

Honourable Chairperson

Honourable Members

Fellow South Africans

Allow me to take this opportunity on behalf of the African National Congress to support budget vote 04 on GCIS. We support this budget having acknowledged that there are some cuts and virements that will affect some of the functions of the department and given its scope, we ideally want to see the budget increase. However, we believe that from a policy and operational point of view, the digital distribution of Vukuzenzele as an example, is not only going to reduce costs, but also increase reach, with an emphasis on photography and audio-visual content creation. Additionally, the department will repurpose R14 million of Vuk'uzenzele's budget over the MTEF period to fund an over-the-top streaming service, which is expected to contain content previously disseminated through the newspaper, as well as other government content. We support this move as it will allow the department to capitalise on the over-the-top platform and possibly generate some income to carryout other functions.

We also support the allocation of R38, 5 million to the Media Development and Diversity Agency. We believe it is going to go a long way in facilitating the growth of community broadcast and print media. The mandate of the entity is to encourage the ownership, control, and access to media by historically disadvantaged communities as well as by the historically diminished Indigenous language and cultural groups. It is for this reason that the ANC commends the decision not to cut costs from the Agency's budget. The agency plays a pivotal role in uplifting community media. It assists with the training of broadcasters, publishers, and journalists amongst other things.

Since its inception the agency has funded around 586 community media projects. This number includes 321 community broadcast projects in the form of community radio and community TV stations, and 185 community print projects in the form of community newspapers, community magazines and small commercial print projects.

Community media is a powerful tool as it empowers people to drive change and creates an inclusive and diverse community. Moreover, it allows local businesses to grow and to inspire the people around them.

We welcome the agency's plan to intensify its focus on ensuring the sustainability of media projects in communities that are underserved by mainstream media. As such, most of the agency's budget over the period ahead is directed at grant funding for 66 community broadcast projects, to help initiate new projects and strengthen existing ones; and 18 community and small commercial media print and digital projects.

Underscoring the agency's commitment to grassroots empowerment funding for these projects is set to amount to R166 million over the MTEF period. In line with the Agency's plans to ensure the sustainability of community media, over the medium term, it plans to provide training in areas such as governance and social media to 120 community media projects through partnerships with stakeholders and training providers. The training will be supported by 16 media literacy initiatives that will be held across the country in areas with a strong community media presence.

Related activities, including 8 research projects on key developments that affect the community media sector, are expected to cost R14 million over the medium term. Total expenditure is expected to amount to R321.5 million over the period ahead, decreasing at an average annual rate of 8.3 per cent, from R137.8 million in 2023/24 to R106.1 million in 2026/27. This considers an anticipated decrease in revenue generated from contributions from traditional media funders whose businesses have been affected by the growth in digital media.

The ANC supports budget vote 04: GCIS.