



Broadcasting Services Act

Fact Sheet Ten:

The Broadcasting Fund (BF)

Introduction:

The Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) (2001) provides for the establishment of a Broadcasting Fund (BF) that is to be administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) acting as a trust fund board.

Purpose of the Fund:

The main purpose of the Fund is to act as a ready source of funds for local authorities for the purposes of availing broadcasting services to disadvantaged communities that are unable to afford televisions and radio sets and other ancillary components; to assist in the training services of personnel interests; promote the provision of broadcasting equipment from other investment partners; provide funds for the promotion of the cultural industry in Zimbabwe for the purposes of promoting the country's film and music industry.

Whilst these specified functions of the BF are somewhat commendable, they have serious implications. Where the BF is supposed to assist in the procurement of broadcasting equipment from foreign sources, simultaneously those that are licensed by the BAZ are unable to receive either foreign funding or any other form of foreign investment. The Act, in establishing the BF pretends to be generous to aspiring broadcasters as well as to the disadvantaged, yet the truth of the matter is that there is an evident intention to monopolise goodwill and create a system of patronage. All aspiring broadcasters should be able to acquire foreign assistance in the acquisition of broadcasting equipment as opposed to waiting for the BAZ through the BF to acquire it for them.

The BF is supposed to be financed mainly from levies imposed on licensees of the BAZ and money acquired through an act of parliament of Zimbabwe. The levies are unfortunately decided solely by the BAZ acting as a board of trustees of the fund and any licensee that fails to meet the required levy shall be subject to a fine or risk having their licence suspended or cancelled.

An example is the South African Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA). The Agency was set up to allow communities that are either historically or materially disadvantaged in relation to access to the media to access broadcasting services through financial assistance for small to medium community based media projects.

Ever since the BSA was passed, the Fund has neither been utilized because there have been no broadcasters granted an operating licence effect the charging of levies nor has its current financial status been made public. There are no stipulations within the BSA that insist on the accounts and usage of the Fund to be made public and scrutinised. Moreover there are no provisions that address the actual impact the funds are to have on the development of the broadcasting industry in Zimbabwe. The audit of the Fund should not only relate to accounting, but also be done within the ambit of a cost benefit analysis to the broadcasting industry.

In effect, there should be the establishment of an independent board to manage the Fund.
There should also be stipulations that disadvantaged communities should be assisted through the BF.

Ends.