

'Terminally ill' SABC on the mend?

 By Issa Sikiti da Silva: @sikitimedia

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If all roads lead to the intensive care unit for terminally ill institutions, there are also a few paths that may lead to health. This seems to be the case for the SABC, which appears to be showing signs of partial recovery after a long period of darkness, chaos and self-destruction.



The public broadcaster's allegedly transparent presentation this week of its first quarter review for the 2011/2012 to the parliamentary committee on communications has reportedly impressed some lawmakers, prompting some critics to believe that there could be light at the end of the Auckland Park tunnel.

The SABC said it reported progress on several of its objectives, and where it fell short on its targets it provided measures to be implemented as corrective action.

"It was a good presentation"



SOS Support Public Broadcasting spokesperson Kate Skinner, who attended the proceedings in Cape Town, told Bizcommunity.com yesterday, Wednesday, 7 September 2011, "It was a good presentation and the MPs said that they were impressed with the documentation.

"There was a sense of purpose and the board and management worked together as a team. That was good to see. There was a sense of leadership. Phil Molefe [acting CEO] and his team spent time answering questions as fully as they could. There was [a] greater transparency and openness from the SABC that I haven't seen in a while."

Top of the agenda were issues related to broadcast content, digital migration, sports rights, the 24-hour News Channel and the appointments to vacant executive positions.

"Need to see SABC consistently giving good presentations"

Skinner added: "It's certainly a good start but we need to see the SABC consistently giving good presentations. They will be making a presentation in mid-October.

"It will be the follow-up to their meeting with National Treasury and the department of communications about progress on their repayment of loans borrowed against the R1.47 billion government guarantee. It will be important to see what they do in that meeting."

The SABC appeared before the same committee in August, asking MPs for what it called additional funding to foot the bill of its 24-hour News Channel, digital migration and [voluntary retrenchments](#) packages, among others.

But Skinner said the public broadcaster's business plans were unclear at that meeting. "This time they will need to have very tight business plans in place. They will need to show us, as the general public, that it is worth it to spend our taxes on further funding for the SABC," she warned.

"Must show us they are moving decisively"

"Also, before they can get any further public funding, they must show us that they are moving decisively on the findings of

the Special Investigating Unit (SIU). The [SIU](#), as you know, has uncovered R1.4 billion worth of irregular expenditure.

"The SABC board and management need to move very decisively on this. They need to hand over criminal cases to the police. They need to keep us updated on what they are doing and they need to recover as much money as possible."

However, with the lack of open and honest communication with its stakeholders (media, unions, lobby groups, independent producers, viewers and listeners) being the public broadcaster's biggest sin, that could be easier said than done.

"They need to keep consulting with all their key stakeholders. I am cautiously optimistic!" added Skinner.

'Naturally let go'

The SABC, which intends to 'naturally let go of' 800 employees over a three-year period, yesterday made its first appearance before the select committee on labour and public enterprises of the National Council of Provinces, reiterating that it will not embark on large-scale retrenchments.

It, however, told the committee that it expects to create 375 direct jobs once the digital migration project has been completed, and an additional 1000 jobs will be created through content production.

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