



Community radio and social change in South Africa: How Kurara FM facilitates local development initiatives

RG Mooki



orcid.org 0000-0002-2387-0071

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Supervisor: Dr M Lubombo

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The bottom half of the cover features a blue and white abstract wave pattern, mirroring the style of the top section.

DECLARATION

I, Reitumetse Mooki declare that except for the references indicated, this is my original work submitted in fulfilment of my master's degree at the North-West University. It has not been submitted before, for any degree or examination at any institution.

I maintain no prior or current professional, personal or financial affiliation with the station. The evidence presented in this study is grounded solely in the empirical data gathered through the interview process. However, I do acknowledge that my interpretation is shaped by my academic background.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my aunt, **Dineo Mooki** & my little sister **Omolemo**.

To **Omolemo**, this achievement marks a path I have paved – one I hope will inspire and guide you. Let this be the beginning of many milestones you will reach and surpass. May you walk this journey with confidence, knowing that the way has been prepared with love, hope, and belief in your potential.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how Kurara FM, a community radio station in South Africa's Northern Cape Province, operates as a catalyst for social change in Kuruman, a region characterised by historical fragmentation and the marginalisation of indigenous groups such as the ǀKhomani. Framed primarily by Media Advocacy Theory and Participatory Development Communication, the study examines how Kurara FM disseminates information, facilitates participation, empowers marginalised voices and negotiates the tension between bottom-up ideals and top-down pressures. A qualitative instrumental case study design was employed, drawing on in-depth interviews with station personnel and semi-structured interviews with community participants, including community leaders and representatives of community-based organisations. The findings indicate that Kurara FM contributes meaningfully to social change by providing locally relevant news, promoting accountability through its watchdog role, supporting youth and women's empowerment, and preserving local languages and cultures. The station uses structured, issue-based programming and multilingual broadcasts to engage listeners and align with broader development and public health priorities. However, the analysis also reveals that participation is largely confined to reactive audience engagement such as call-ins and social media responses while decisions about programming and agenda-setting remain primarily management-driven and shaped by external policy frameworks and funding imperatives. Technical limitations in signal coverage further exclude remote settlements from full participation in the communicative space. The study concludes that Kurara FM functions as a catalyst for social change in a partial and contested manner. It expands spaces for voice and engagement, yet these spaces are unevenly accessible and constrained by institutional, commercial and spatial dynamics. The dissertation argues that understanding community radio as a complex institutional site where participation, power, identity and development are continuously negotiated offers a more nuanced basis for theorising its role in social transformation. The findings refine existing assumptions about community radio's potential and limitations and point to the need for deeper, structurally informed approaches to participatory media practice.

KEYWORDS: *Community radio; Kurara FM; social change; Media Advocacy Theory; participatory development communication; grassroots engagement; marginalised communities.*

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ABREBIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
AMARC 5	Fifth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcaster
CASET	Cassette Education Trust
CBSP	Community Broadcasting Support Programme
CCA	Culture-Centred Approach
DCDT	Department of Communications and Digital Technologies
FAWO	Film and Allied Workers Organisation
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority
JTG	John Taolo Gaetsewe district
MDDA	Media Development and Diversity Agency
NCRF	National Community Radio Forum
NEMISA	National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
SABC	South African Broadcasting Service
SASCO	South African Students Congress
SASPU	South African Students Press Union
SIOC	Sishen Iron Ore Company's
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UWC	University of the Western Cape

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION

1.1. Introduction

This study investigates how Kurara FM, a community radio station based in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District of the Northern Cape province of South Africa, operates as a catalyst for social change in Kuruman, a region marked by historical fragmentation and the marginalisation of indigenous communities such as the ǀKhomani. According to its own mandate, as articulated on the station's "About Us" page, Kurara FM positions itself as a vehicle for social change and empowerment by educating community members about broadcasting, improving the welfare of rural areas through exposure to local and national events, and bridging social gaps through diverse, multilingual programming (Kurara FM, 2025). The central concern of this study is to interrogate how, and to what extent, these stated commitments translate into practice in a context characterised by spatial dispersal, economic precarity and layered power relations. While community radio is, by definition, a mass or broadcast medium, the study argues that a station such as Kurara FM can function as an instrument for development: a platform through which community members not only engage in conversations about their developmental concerns, but also raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes that address issues confronting them, with the aim of achieving broader social change (Wallack, 1994:421).

There is broad consensus in development communication literature that community radio provides an important platform for addressing developmental issues (Wabwire, 2013; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019; Mhlanga, 2016; Bosch, 2014; Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2022; Mhagama, 2015). Community radio emerged in part as a response to mainstream media's failure to serve marginalised and rural constituencies adequately, with a view to bridging the information gaps created by commercial and public broadcasters. In this light, community radio stations are seen as tools for community development that can contribute positively to their distinct constituencies by providing locally grounded information, supporting collective problem-solving and offering spaces for public deliberation (Wabwire, 2013; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019; Mhlanga, 2016; Bosch, 2014; Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2022; Mhagama, 2015). As development communication tools, community radio stations are expected to provide communities "with development-related information, as well as a platform to engage in dialogue on a range of developmental issues" (Bosch, 2018:5). From a development media theory perspective, this communicative role can be understood in terms of media advocacy, which Waisbord (2018:25) locates within the principle of participatory development: media are used not merely to transmit

messages, but to support collective efforts to influence policies, institutions and power relations.

Within this normative framework, participation becomes a central criterion for assessing the democratic and developmental character of community radio. Dalene (2007:21) argues that participation should permeate every aspect of community radio, from ownership and governance to programme design and on-air content. Such participation is seen as crucial for sustainability, as it “gives meaning and effect [to] ownership and control by the community” (Mtimde, 2024:14). Moreover, participation is not only a regulatory requirement in the South African context; it also has a pragmatic dimension, as it can increase listenership and audience loyalty when people “hear themselves” reflected on air (Mtimde, 2024:14). Against this background, the present study interrogates how Kurara FM’s everyday practices align with these participatory ideals and developmental expectations, and how the station navigates the tensions between grassroots agendas and structural constraints in the specific rural setting of Kuruman.

1.2. Background and context

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa’s broadcasting landscape has been organised into a three-tier system comprising public, commercial and community services, with community radio explicitly mandated to advance media diversity, local content and public-interest programming (ICASA, 2017; MDDA, 2020). Community broadcasters are licensed and regulated by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), whose Community Broadcasting Services Regulations emphasise community ownership, participatory governance structures and programming that reflects the needs and interests of a clearly defined community (ICASA, 2019). In parallel, the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was established as a statutory body to support the development and sustainability of community and small commercial media, particularly in under-served and historically marginalised areas (MDDA, 2020). Within this policy framework, community radio has come to be seen not merely as a technical platform, but as a mechanism for widening access to communication, promoting participatory democracy and strengthening local public spheres.

Community radio stations are, in principle, non-profit entities that are owned and controlled by the communities they serve, address their audiences as citizens rather than consumers, and are expected to enable ordinary people to participate in content production and station governance. South African policy emphasises that community radio must be rooted in a geographic or community-of-interest base, with clearly articulated processes through which community members can influence programming, raise concerns and hold station

management accountable (ICASA, 2017; ICASA, 2019). In practice, however, community radio stations operate under conditions of financial precarity, limited human resources and uneven technical capacity, and they often rely on a fragile mix of advertising, sponsorships, donor funding and support from agencies such as the MDDA (MDDA, 2020). These structural constraints shape the extent to which community radio can fulfil its normative promises of empowerment, participation and development, particularly in remote rural contexts.

The Northern Cape province presents a particularly demanding context for community broadcasting. It is the largest of South Africa's provinces by land area, yet has the smallest share of the national population and one of the lowest population densities, with only about two people per square kilometre (Statistics South Africa, 2024; Statistics South Africa, 2025). Many settlements are small, dispersed villages, and considerable distances separate households from administrative and economic centres. Official statistics show that the Northern Cape accounts for just over 2% of South Africa's total population, with a demographic profile marked by high levels of youth, persistent poverty and limited employment opportunities (Statistics South Africa, 2024; Statistics South Africa, 2025). The province is linguistically diverse, with Afrikaans and Setswana among the most widely spoken languages, alongside isiXhosa and English (Statistics South Africa, 2024). These features produce a communication environment in which mainstream media have historically had limited presence, and where infrastructural and socio-economic inequalities contribute to information gaps between rural communities and provincial or national decision-making centres.

Within this dispersed and historically marginalised space, community radio has been positioned as a crucial mechanism for reducing information asymmetries, supporting local development initiatives and offering platforms for public deliberation. The policy emphasis on media development and diversity explicitly targets rural provinces and historically disadvantaged communities, aiming to redress exclusion from access to media ownership, content and careers (MDDA, 2020). In such settings, a single community radio station can become a primary channel through which residents learn about government services, development programmes, economic opportunities and civic participation processes. At the same time, the distances between villages, the cost of infrastructure and the uneven distribution of connectivity mean that sustaining truly participatory, bottom-up communication is logistically challenging.

Kurara FM is one such community radio station, based in Kuruman in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District of the Northern Cape. According to the station's own account, Kurara FM began broadcasting on 1 January 2012 and has since expanded its transmitter reach to cover the entire John Taolo Gaetsewe district as well as parts of the Siyanda (ZF Mgcawu) and

Frances Baard districts, including towns such as Kathu, Danielskuil, Postmasburg, Olifantshoek, Vryburg, Taung and Kimberley, and more than 204 surrounding villages (Kurara FM, 2025). The station broadcasts primarily on 98.9 MHz and operates 24 hours a day, with programming in Setswana, English and Afrikaans (Kurara FM, 2025). Its mandate, as articulated on its website, is to “bridge the gap in the district” by empowering, informing and educating rural communities, celebrating cultural diversity and strengthening connections between local residents and broader social, economic and political developments (Kurara FM, 2025).

The John Taolo Gaetsewe District itself is largely rural and has historically been affected by mining-led economic patterns, uneven service delivery and the marginalisation of remote villages from provincial development priorities. Population data and socio-economic indicators show persistent inequalities in access to employment, education, basic services and communication infrastructure when compared to more urbanised provinces (Statistics South Africa, 2024; Statistics South Africa, 2025). In this context, Kurara FM’s combination of multi-lingual broadcasting, geographically extensive reach and explicit community-development mandate positions it as a potential hub for local information flows, civic engagement and mobilisation around social and economic issues.

However, the ability of any particular station to play a transformative role cannot be assumed. Community radio often operates at the intersection of grassroots participation, donor conditionalities, state communication agendas and commercial imperatives. Stations may depend on government advertising, sponsorship from local elites or funding channelled through agencies such as the MDDA, which can generate subtle pressures on editorial independence and participatory practices (MDDA, 2020). In sparsely populated and economically constrained regions, the limited advertising base, high transmission costs and reliance on volunteers can further constrain the station’s capacity to sustain dialogic, community-driven programming.

Against this backdrop, Kurara FM offers a strategic site for examining whether, and how, community radio can facilitate social change in fragmented, historically marginalised rural communities such as those in and around Kuruman. The station’s extensive geographic coverage and multi-lingual programming create conditions for connecting scattered villages and diverse social groups into a shared communicative space (Kurara FM, 2025; Statistics South Africa, 2024). At the same time, the broader policy and funding environment highlights ongoing tensions between ideals of bottom-up participation and the structural realities of regulation, resource constraints and institutional dependence (ICASA, 2017; ICASA, 2019; MDDA, 2020). Framing the study within this context foregrounds the central analytical

problem: whether Kurara FM can move beyond merely transmitting information to actively supporting participatory, locally grounded development processes in a province marked by distance, diversity and enduring inequality.

1.3. Problem statement

The Northern Cape Province of South Africa is characterised by a low concentration of media outlets and widely scattered villages, conditions that plausibly contribute to limited access to information and development resources. Previous studies have highlighted persistent challenges in the region, including the exploitation of marginalised groups such as the ‡Khomani, weak community cohesion and ineffective government interventions (Grant, 2012). These factors pose a challenge for existing community radio stations that are expected to empower local communities and promote sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, the scattered nature of the villages, the limited media presence (Mokoena *et al.*, 2019; Grant, 2012) and the recognised role of community radio in development (Wabwire, 2013; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019; Mhlanga, 2016; Bosch, 2014; Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2022; Mhagama, 2015) suggest that Kurara FM has the potential to serve as a crucial platform for information dissemination, community engagement and empowerment. The critical question, however, is whether community radio such as Kurara FM can genuinely embody a bottom-up approach in fragmented communities with histories of marginalisation, or whether it risks replicating top-down dynamics because of its reliance on external funding and government support.

According to Teer-Tomaselli and De Villiers (1998), radio functions as a universal mass medium for participatory communication and action. From a media advocacy theoretical perspective in development communication, communities can use community radio instrumentally to raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes that address issues of concern, with the aim of achieving social change (Wallack, 1994:421). Yet, despite Kurara FM's recent efforts to promote agricultural development (Mokoena *et al.*, 2019), the extent and manner in which it contributes to broader community development initiatives remain under-examined and invite academic scrutiny. This is particularly significant because communities are not homogeneous; multiple and diverse subgroups must collaborate in their efforts to bring about social change.

In this light, the study draws on the six foundational ontological and epistemological assumptions of participatory development communication theory that, according to Dervin and Huesca (1999), are underpinned by 'chaos', namely: authority, naturalism, cultural relativity, constructivism, postmodernism and communitarianism. In summary, these assumptions

prompt questions about where community radio derives its authority; how it facilitates the dissemination of innovations from experts to address community challenges (naturalism); how it mobilises different voices within the community (cultural relativity); how it amplifies diverse constructions of reality and experience (constructivism); and how it helps navigate and manage the fragmented and pluralistic nature of communities (postmodernism) in the pursuit of a communitarian development agenda (communitarianism). Together, these assumptions provide a scaffold for critiquing the ways in which Kurara FM navigates this ‘chaos’—for example, whether its authority derives from grassroots legitimacy or external actors, and how it balances constructivism (amplifying diverse realities) with communitarianism (fostering collective action for social change).

1.4. Research aim

Against the foregoing conceptual and contextual background, the study, this study aims to examine how Kurara FM, as a community radio station in the Northern Cape, facilitates social change and local development initiatives in and around Kuruman’s historically marginalised and geographically dispersed communities.

More specifically, the study seeks to analyse Kurara FM’s strategies for information dissemination and participatory engagement, its practices in enabling the involvement of marginalised groups such as the ǀKhomani in content creation, and community members’ perceptions of the station’s role in empowering local voices and advancing social change. In doing so, the study also aims to assess the extent to which Kurara FM’s everyday practices align with grassroots-driven approaches as conceptualised in Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication, or whether they tend to reproduce hierarchical dynamics within a fragmented rural context.

1.5. Research questions

In line with the research aim, this study is guided by the following research questions and objectives.

1.5.1. General research question

The central research question guiding the inquiry is in what ways does Kurara FM facilitate social change and local development initiatives in and around Kuruman’s historically marginalised and geographically dispersed communities?

1.5.2. Specific research questions

To operationalise the general research question and provide a structured basis for empirical inquiry, the study is organised around a set of specific research questions. These questions disaggregate the broad concern with social change and local development initiatives into more focused dimensions related to Kurara FM's strategies, participatory practices, the experiences of marginalised groups and the underlying power dynamics shaping its operations. In combination, they translate the overarching aim into analytically manageable components that can be addressed through the chosen research design described in Chapter Four.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following specific research questions:

- a. How does Kurara FM employ strategies of information dissemination and participatory engagement to foster social change in Kuruman?
- b. In what ways does Kurara FM enable marginalised communities such as the †Khomani to participate actively in content creation processes?
- c. How do diverse community members perceive Kurara FM's role in empowering local voices and advancing social change?
- d. To what extent do Kurara FM's practices align with grassroots-driven approaches, as conceptualised by Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication, rather than reproducing hierarchical dynamics in historically fragmented communities?

By addressing these questions, the study establishes a foundation for achieving its research objectives.

1.5.3. Research objectives

To address the above questions in a systematic manner, the study translates them into the following research objectives that clarify what the investigation seeks to achieve empirically and analytically. These objectives provided a concrete guide for the research design, data generation and analysis, and ensured that each dimension of the inquiry was explicitly targeted rather than remaining at the level of broad questions. Accordingly, the study pursued four objectives namely to:

- a. Examine the mechanisms through which Kurara FM fosters social change in Kuruman by identifying and analysing its strategies for information dissemination and participatory engagement, through in-depth interviews with key station personnel

- b. Evaluate how Kurara FM enables marginalised communities such as the ̳Khomani to participate actively in content creation processes, through semi-structured interviews with station management and analysis of programming workflows
- c. Analyse community members' perceptions of Kurara FM's contributions to social change by collecting and interpreting qualitative narratives from diverse community representatives. Through semi-structured interviews with community representatives, and
- d. Assess critically, through the dual lens of Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication's ontological assumptions, whether Kurara FM's practices align with grassroots-driven approaches or reproduce hierarchical dynamics in historically fragmented communities.

Collectively, these objectives bridge empirical insights with the theoretical lens to clarify how community radio can advance equitable social transformation in fragmented contexts.

1.6. Significance of the study

Most studies on community radio in South Africa positions community radio stations as the "voice of the voiceless" or conceptualises them primarily as tools for development in post-apartheid society. However, this body of research is disproportionately concentrated in urban and township settings, leaving deep-rural contexts such as Kuruman and the widely dispersed villages of the John Taolo Gaetsewe District largely unexplored. These areas face distinct infrastructural constraints, including poor digital signal coverage, which shape both the function and accessibility of community radio in ways that differ fundamentally from urban environments.

In addition, existing literature tends to frame community radio as a one-directional channel for disseminating government programmes, agricultural information, educational content, and health services. While these framing positions community radio as a catalyst for development, it leaves under-examined the processes through which development outcomes are achieved. In particular, the role of community members in shaping programming, participating in governance, and influencing development communication practices remains insufficiently addressed.

This study therefore contributes to scholarship by investigating whether community radio in deep-rural contexts can genuinely embody a bottom-up approach to communication or whether it inadvertently reproduces top-down dynamics despite its developmental mandate. It demonstrates the contradictions between participatory ideals and institutional realities exemplified in the case of Kurara FM. The applicability and effectiveness of development

communication models in deep-rural environments, where social contracts, community structures, and developmental needs differ markedly from those of urban or township communities are illustrated. The findings offer empirical insights that demonstrate how participatory ideals are partially realised and structurally constrained. Understanding these dynamics can inform agencies such as the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) on the necessity of differentiated funding models for rural stations, as well as the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) on the potential need for distinct regulatory mandates tailored to rural community radio.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen understanding of whether, and under what conditions, community radio can transcend its structural, institutional and resource constraints to become a genuinely transformative force for equitable development. This concern foregrounds questions of power: who controls narratives, whose knowledge and experience are legitimised, how competing interests are negotiated, and how tensions between unity and diversity are managed in practice. Investigating the ways in which community radio operates within rural development contexts – particularly in marginalised, culturally diverse and geographically dispersed areas such as Kuruman – is therefore instrumental in understanding how community radio can navigate multiple subgroups (cultural relativity) without simply amplifying already dominant voices. The study is further significant in that it generates context-specific insights into the broader role and impact of media in addressing complex development challenges in South Africa’s rural peripheries. Crucially, the findings will be relevant not only for theoretical refinement in community and development communication, but also for policymakers, development agencies and media practitioners, offering evidence-informed guidance on how to strengthen the use of community radio as a tool for sustainable development, participatory governance and social empowerment in rural South Africa.

1.7. Theoretical overview

This study is anchored primarily in two complementary theoretical perspectives namely Media Advocacy Theory and Participatory Development Communication. However, some elements of Development Media Theory and Agenda-setting Theory are also employed selectively as secondary lenses that situate Kurara FM within wider media–state–society relations. But taken together, these perspectives offer a layered theoretical framework appropriate to the complexity of Kurara FM’s role in Kuruman. Participatory communication provides the normative benchmark for assessing the quality and depth of community involvement in the station’s practices (Freire 1970; Servaes 2008; Melkote & Steeves 2001). Media Advocacy Theory illuminates how the station may function as a vehicle for collective voice and policy-

oriented pressure by highlighting the strategic use of radio to reframe issues and target power holders (Wallack 1994; Waisbord 2014; Fayoyin 2014). Development media theory helps to contextualise the expectations and constraints imposed by state-centred development agendas and funding regimes (McQuail 2010; Bosch 2014), while agenda-setting theory clarifies how Kurara FM's issue selection and framing shape the local public agenda and contribute to the construction of what counts as "the" development problem in Kuruman (McCombs & Shaw 1972; McCombs 2004).

1.8. Research design and methodological overview

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate how Kurara FM facilitated social change and local development initiatives in and around Kuruman. A case study approach was appropriate because the research focused on understanding a contemporary phenomenon, community radio practice, in depth and within its real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context were not clearly evident (Yin, 2018:45–47). Kurara FM was treated as an instrumental case that highlights broader questions about community radio, participation and development in fragmented rural settings rather than as an end in itself. The qualitative orientation enabled close attention to meaning, interpretation and lived experience, which was consistent with the theoretical framework of media advocacy and participatory development communication (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3–5; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:6–9).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at and around Kurara FM, including station personnel as well as community representatives who engaged with the station. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provided a flexible yet systematic way of probing participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretive frameworks, while still allowing unanticipated insights to emerge (Bryman, 2016). In addition, the study undertook a qualitative content and/or programme analysis of selected Kurara FM broadcasts that focused on development-related issues, public participation and local problem-solving.

The sampling strategy was purposive, guided by the research questions and the need to access information-rich cases. Participants were selected on the basis of their roles in the station, their involvement in local development initiatives, or their positioning as listeners and community members affected by, or engaged with, Kurara FM's programming. Within this purposive frame, the study also used elements of snowball sampling to identify additional participants who were central to specific initiatives or networks that emerged during fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final number of interviews was determined by the point at which

additional interviews no longer generated substantively new insights, in line with the principle of information redundancy rather than numerical saturation.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach combining deductive and inductive elements. Initially, a coding framework was informed by theoretical concepts drawn from media advocacy (for example issue framing, agenda-setting, target audiences and power holders) and participatory communication (for example inclusion, voice, dialogue and communitarianism), as well as by the research questions. At the same time, the analysis remained open to themes emerging from the data that had not been anticipated in advance. Thematic analysis provided a systematic yet flexible method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning across the qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79–81). Coding and theme development proceeded iteratively, involving repeated movement back and forth between the data, the theoretical framework and the evolving interpretation.

Ethical considerations were central to the design and implementation of the study, given that it involved human participants, vulnerable and marginalised communities, and a relatively small geographic setting where anonymity could be difficult to guarantee. The research complied with the North-West University's Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) ethics policies and procedures for research involving human participants as detailed in Chapter Four.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed strategies associated with credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:300–316). These included using multiple data sources and maintaining a detailed audit trail of methodological decisions. A full account of the research design, sampling, data generation and analytic procedures are provided in Chapter Four.

1.9. Delimitations and scope of the study

This study is delimited, first, in terms of its geographical and substantive foci. Geographically, it concentrates on Kurara FM as a community radio station based in Kuruman and serving the John Taolo Gaetsewe District and its surrounding rural settlements in the Northern Cape. Although the station's signal extends into parts of other districts and into neighbouring provinces, the analysis foregrounds Kurara FM's role within and around Kuruman and the villages that fall within its primary catchment area. The study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of all community radio in the Northern Cape or in South Africa; rather, Kurara FM is treated as an instrumental case that sheds light on the possibilities and constraints of community radio in a specific rural, historically marginalised setting (Yin, 2018). Substantively, the study examines Kurara FM's contribution to social change and local

development initiatives, with particular attention to information dissemination, participatory engagement and the inclusion of marginalised communities such as the †Khomani.

The study is also delimited by its participant and data focus. Empirical material is drawn from semi-structured interviews with selected station staff, community leaders, representatives of community-based organisations and a purposively sampled group of participants. The study does not claim to represent statistically all listeners in the district. Rather, it seeks depth of understanding from information-rich participants whose experiences and positions are relevant to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Theoretically, the study is framed by Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication. These perspectives guided the formulation of the research questions, the design of the interview guides and the analytic lens through which the data are interpreted (Wallack *et al.*, 1993; Servaes, 1999; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). This theoretical delimitation allows for a focused analysis of power, participation and development within a coherent conceptual frame.

Temporally, the study examines Kurara FM's practices and community perceptions as they manifested during the period in which the fieldwork and data analysis were conducted, rather than providing a full historical account of the station from its inception. References to earlier phases of the station's development rely on documentary sources and participants' recollections, but the primary emphasis is on the contemporary operation of Kurara FM at the time of the study.

It is important to highlight that these delimitations are not presented as weaknesses but as necessary boundaries that make it possible to address the research problem in sufficient depth and with methodological coherence.

1.10. Clarification of key concepts

Given the centrality of certain concepts to this study, it is important to clarify how they are used in this study. While more extensive theoretical discussion is provided in Chapter Three; the definitions below serve to provide a brief a conceptual starting point for the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters.

1.10.1. Community radio

In this dissertation, *community radio* refers to a non-profit broadcasting service that is owned and/or controlled by a geographically or interest-defined community and that operates with a primary mandate to serve that community's information, cultural and developmental needs

(Bosch, 2013; Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Al-Hassan *et al.*, 2011). Community radio is distinguished from public and commercial broadcasting by its community-based governance structures, local content orientation, multi-lingual programming and emphasis on participation and “voice” rather than profit. Kurara FM is understood as such a community radio station, licensed to serve the people in and around Kuruman.

1.10.2. Social change

The term *social change* is used to denote shifts in social relations, practices, institutions, values and opportunities that affect people’s everyday lives, particularly in ways that enhance equity and reduce forms of marginalisation or exclusion (Melkote & Steeves, 2015; Servaes, 1999). In the context of this study, social change may include improved access to information, greater community participation in decision-making, strengthened local accountability, and enhanced capacity of marginalised groups to influence development processes. The focus is not on short-term attitudinal change alone but on more structural and relational transformations, even when these remain partial or contested.

1.10.3. Local development initiatives

Local development initiatives refer to programmes, projects or organised efforts that seek to improve living conditions, access to services, livelihoods, health, education or social cohesion at community level (Milan, 2009; Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). These initiatives may be led by government, civil society organisations, community-based structures, or partnerships among these actors. In this dissertation, the term encompasses both formal development projects and more informal community efforts to address local problems, to the extent that they are mediated, supported or contested through Kurara FM’s programming.

1.10.4. Marginalised communities

The concept of *marginalised communities* is used to describe social groups that experience systematic exclusion from resources, decision-making and representation, whether on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, class, geography or other intersecting factors (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). In the Northern Cape, this includes, among others, groups such as the †Khomani and residents of remote villages who have historically been at the periphery of economic and political power. The study is particularly concerned with how such groups are represented, included or excluded in Kurara FM’s programming and participatory mechanisms.

1.10.5. Participatory communication

Participatory communication refers to communication processes that are dialogic, horizontal and inclusive, enabling people to identify problems, deliberate on alternatives and act collectively, rather than being passive recipients of information from external experts (Servaes, 1999; Dervin & Huesca, 1999; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). In relation to community radio, participatory communication involves community members taking part in programme conception, production and evaluation, contributing their own voices and knowledges to shape the station's agenda. This concept stands in contrast to top-down, transmission-oriented models of communication that treat audiences as targets rather than partners.

1.11. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study, located it within the broader South African broadcasting and development context, and motivated the focus on Kurara FM as a community radio station serving historically marginalised and geographically dispersed communities in and around Kuruman. The chapter lays the conceptual, contextual and methodological foundations for the rest of the thesis. The next chapter develops the literature review in greater depth by engaging critically with scholarship on community media and community radio, development and participatory communication, and social change, the empirical debates within which this study is situated.

1.12. Study structure

This study is structured into six chapters, the scope and objectives of which are outlined below.

Chapter One: This is an introductory chapter, it introduces the study, justifies it and provides background and context of it. Furthermore, it articulates why a study on community radio in Kuruman is an important topic worth pursuing.

Chapter Two: This is a literature review. It outlines existing literature related to community radio and how it functions as catalyst for social change within marginalised community. It looks onto the historically developments of South African media, particularly community radio. Moreover, it draws on various arguments and different school of thoughts with focus on community radio, participatory communication and advocacy.

Chapter Three: This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of how Kurara FM, as a community radio station facilitates social change and local development initiatives in Kuruman.

Chapter Four: presents research methodology and design for this study. It draws on the theoretical framework to justify the research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments and analysis procedures used to investigate Kurara FM's role in local

development initiatives and social change.

Chapter Five: presents the findings from interviews with Kurara FM personnel and community leaders in Kuruman. It focuses on the analyses and interpretation of the data collected, offering a view of the station's operations.

Chapter six: is a final chapter, it consolidates the key insights from preceding chapters and provides conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNITY RADIO AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

2.1. Introduction

This study is about community radio and its potential as a catalyst for social change in local communities. In this chapter, existing literature related to community radio and how it facilitates local development initiatives is reviewed. The chapter aims to critically examine existing scholarship on community radio, participation, and social change to contextualise Kurara FM within broader debates on community radio and development in South Africa's historical and policy context. It examines empirical studies on participation, empowerment, and inclusion of marginalised voices, particularly in rural contexts. The review also discusses challenges such as funding limitations, political influence, and tensions between grassroots participation and hierarchical practices. It concludes by identifying specific gaps such as the limited focus on marginalised voices like the †Khomani and the balance between grassroots participation and hierarchical practices.

2.2. Community radio in South Africa: Historical and contextual background

The contemporary concept of community radio in South Africa can be traced back to the Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves Conference held in the Netherlands in 1991 (Ibrahim, 2004:40). The conference was organised by anti-apartheid movements in the Netherlands in collaboration with the African National Congress (ANC), the Film and Allied Workers Organisation (FAWO) and Radio Freedom (Teer-Tomaselli, cited in Osunkunle, 2013:46). Its purpose was to rethink and redefine the notion of community radio in ways that would be appropriate for a forthcoming democratic dispensation (Van Zyl, 1994:66). More specifically, the conference sought to explore how community radio could be configured to help redistribute symbolic and communicative power in post-apartheid South Africa by opening up the airwaves to historically excluded communities (Osunkunle, 2013:46). Osunkunle (2013:46) describes Jabulani! as "the first major attempt at drawing up specific guidelines for freeing the media from party-political control", signalling a move away from state-dominated broadcasting and towards a pluralistic, citizen-oriented media landscape.

The conference produced a set of recommendations that have since been widely cited in discussions of South African broadcasting policy (Van Zyl, 1994:66). These recommendations included that broadcasting should: be open to all sections of South African society; actively contribute to overcoming divisions and inequalities created by apartheid; support the development of a society and culture with which all South Africans can identify; reflect the

country's full linguistic and cultural diversity; be democratic in form and content, allowing broad participation and reflecting social complexity; and belong to citizens not merely as consumers but as active participants in public life. In line with these principles, the conference further recommended that the South African media landscape be structured into three distinct tiers namely public, commercial and community broadcasting (Osunkunle, 2013:46; Ibrahim, 2004:40; Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2024:1). These recommendations laid the groundwork for the post-1994 broadcasting system, within which community radio was envisaged as a key mechanism for advancing democratisation, participation and development.

Within this three-tier system, public service broadcasting is understood as a broadcasting service that exists primarily for the benefit of society rather than for profit-making (Tracy, cited in Ryan, 2000:1). Located within the broader development media tradition, public service broadcasters are expected to serve the public interest by providing citizens with information about governmental policies and plans and by supporting informed democratic participation (South African Government, 2014). In South Africa, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is the designated public broadcaster. Although it relies on a combination of licence fees, advertising and government support, Mokgosi (2021:16) argues that the SABC ought to be protected from both "state oppression and commercial coercion". To safeguard the public broadcaster's autonomy and to regulate the broader broadcasting environment, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established on 30 March 1994 in terms of the IBA Act of 1993 (Bosch, 2014:427; Bosch, 2018:5). The IBA was tasked not only with transforming the SABC from a mouthpiece of apartheid propaganda into a more credible public service institution (Osunkunle, 2013:35), but also with issuing broadcasting licences and exercising oversight over all broadcasters, including emerging community stations (Osunkunle, 2013:46; Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2020:3).

Commercial broadcasting, by contrast, refers to private broadcasting services owned and/or controlled by individuals or corporate entities whose primary objective is profit-making. These stations operate predominantly through advertising revenue and sponsorships and are driven by audience ratings and market share (Mohapanele, 2017:5). Examples include national stations such as Metro FM and Jacaranda FM, as well as regional or local stations like East Coast Radio, all of which attract large audiences by offering entertainment-driven content designed to appeal to advertisers. Tahir (2002:72) notes that commercial stations, unlike community broadcasters, tend to focus less on local development or participatory communication and more on market-oriented programming aimed at maximising listenership and advertising income. While they may occasionally address developmental issues, such engagement is typically incidental to their commercial imperatives.

Community broadcasting services occupy a distinct position within this landscape. Like public service broadcasting, they are non-profit in orientation, but they are owned, managed and controlled by the local communities they are licensed to serve (Mtimde, 2024:12). It is in this sense that Mtimde (2024:12) refers to community radio as “People’s Radio”. Mohapanele (2017:5) observes that community broadcasters may be considered part of the broader public service sector, yet they differ from national public broadcasters in that they are designed to serve specific geographic communities or communities of interest rather than the country as a whole. Their mandate is to provide locally relevant news, information and cultural content, and to create spaces for participation in which community members can contribute to and shape programming.

Within the South African context, community radio stations are generally classified into four broad categories: stations serving specific geographic areas; campus radio stations based at universities or colleges; religious stations catering to particular faith communities; and stations dedicated to specific cultural or ethnic groups (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2024:4; Wabwire, 2013:42). Geographic community stations are licensed to serve residents in a defined locality, such as a town, district or cluster of villages. Campus stations such as PUKfm and NWU FM at North-West University’s Potchefstroom and Mahikeng campuses respectively primarily serve student and staff communities and often function as training platforms for aspiring media practitioners. Religious community stations, for example Radio Veritas, a Catholic station established in 1999 by Father Emil Blaser, focus on faith-based content and spiritual programming for their constituencies. Cultural or ethnically oriented community stations serve particular language or cultural groups, contributing to the preservation and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Kurara FM falls into the first category: it is a geographic community radio station licensed to serve the communities of the John Taolo Gaetsewe District in the Northern Cape. As a local station, it is expected to reflect the everyday realities, languages and development priorities of the people living in and around Kuruman and its surrounding villages. It is within this historical and institutional context—shaped by the Jabulani! resolutions, the three-tier broadcasting system and the specific mandates of community broadcasting, that Kurara FM’s role as a potential catalyst for social change must be understood.

2.3. *Community radio in South Africa: From apartheid to present*

Community radio in South Africa has a complex history shaped by the country’s political transition and the struggle to amplify diverse local voices. Its emergence is closely linked to efforts to free the country’s airwaves from party-political control and to democratise

communication after decades in which broadcasting served as an instrument of apartheid ideology (Mtimde, 2024:9). During the 1980s, South Africa's airwaves were tightly controlled by the apartheid regime and were used as a propaganda tool by the National Party; the SABC functioned as a mouthpiece for promoting and advancing apartheid policies (Mtimde, 2024:9). At that time, there were only two commercial radio stations, Capital Radio 604 and Radio 702, operating alongside the SABC's extensive public network (Mtimde, 2024:10). Against this backdrop of centralised control, activists, community organisers and progressive media practitioners began experimenting with alternative communication spaces that would eventually evolve into the contemporary community radio sector.

Radio Zibonele and Bush Radio are widely recognised as the first community radio stations in South Africa. While Bush Radio emerged from a student-led initiative, Radio Zibonele developed from a health communication project initiated by a medical doctor, Dr Urgoiti, who "illegally broadcasted health programmes" in Gugulethu, a township in Cape Town, in the 1980s (Osunkunle, 2013:47). These broadcasts, though technically unlawful at the time, were an early attempt to use radio as a tool for local education and empowerment in a context where formal media remained hostile or indifferent to township realities. In 1993 the project evolved into Zibonele Community Radio, which continues to broadcast mainly in isiXhosa in Khayelitsha, a large township in the Western Cape (Radio Africa, 2024). The trajectory from clandestine health broadcasts to a licensed community station illustrates how community radio emerged out of practical efforts to meet local communication needs under restrictive conditions.

Bush Radio's history is equally emblematic of the sector's activist roots. The station began as a student-led campaign at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to transform a music jukebox in the student centre into a campus-based community radio station (Mtimde, 2024:15). The jukebox, which played music and captured unscripted conversations from student DJs and presenters, became a focal point for political and cultural expression on campus (Mtimde, 2024:15). The campaign to convert it into a radio station was driven by the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO, now SASCO), chaired by Satch Radebe, together with the UWC media committee and activists such as Lumko Mtimde, Tango Lamani, Sifiso Ndlazi, Nobom Ncadana, Nokhanyo Madyibi, Melikhaya Vanqa and Duma Dube, among others (Mtimde, 2024:15).

According to Mtimde (2024:15), he later became chairperson of the UWC Media Society and affiliated the society with the South African Students Press Union (SASPU), JP Louw and the Cassette Education Trust (CASET). CASET, an NGO established by Edric Gorfinkel, Gabriel Urgoiti, Sandile Dikeni, Hein Marais and Tracey Naughton, sought to develop the

audiocassette as a medium of communication in the struggle for sustainable democracy (Gorfinkel, 1992:1; Mtimde, 2024:15; Ibrahim, 2004:40). Through CASET, UWC students received training in radio production and began producing cassettes that documented “struggle activities and the Defiance Campaign led by the MDM and UDF”, distributing them at rallies and to commuters from the Cape Flats and other informal settlements around Cape Town (Ibrahim, 2004:40; Mtimde, 2024:15; Osunkunle, 2013:147). These cassette tapes were also played through the UWC jukebox, effectively turning it into a proto-community communication platform (Mtimde, 2024:15).

At that stage, UWC did not have a community radio station, and Naughton and colleagues encouraged students to establish their own station off campus (Ibrahim, 2004:40). Supported by CASET and by figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, students pushed ahead with the idea of creating a station that was neither owned by the apartheid state nor by commercial media interests. Ibrahim (2004:40) describes this initiative as marking the beginning of “a new media model for South Africa – a radio station not owned by either the apartheid state or commercial barons”. The station came to be known as Bush Radio, drawing on UWC’s earlier nickname as the “bush college” in the 1960s (Ibrahim, 2004:40; Mtimde, 2024:16). Crucially, students at UWC were not passive listeners but active participants in designing, producing and disseminating content, illustrating an early form of participatory communication (Ibrahim, 2004:40).

The idea of Bush Radio was closely tied to CASET’s work. Gorfinkel (1992:1) notes that CASET’s mandate was to use audiocassette technology to record and circulate “mass protests, rallies and ANC gatherings”, thereby creating a parallel communication system that bypassed state-controlled media. These recordings were distributed both inside and outside South Africa, contributing to transnational solidarity networks (Osunkunle, 2013:48). CASET also provided training for prospective broadcasters and, according to Osunkunle (2013:47), played a central role in raising funds to purchase equipment for Bush Radio. At the Fifth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC 5) in Mexico in 1993, CASET’s management met with anti-apartheid organisations from Germany and the Netherlands who subsequently donated funds to support Bush Radio (Osunkunle, 2013:47). AMARC, an international non-profit organisation established in 1983, was dedicated to promoting the right to communicate and supporting the development of community radio worldwide (Mtimde *et al.*, 1998:3).

As Bush Radio grew, CASET was gradually absorbed into the station, with its assets and training functions becoming part of Bush Radio’s institutional base (Mtimde, 2024:16). Through Bush Radio, CASET’s work of producing cassettes and training people in radio

broadcasting skills continued, and training soon became central to the station's mission (Mtimde, 2024:16). In its early years, Bush Radio conducted workshops on "how to set up a community radio station", which contributed to the establishment of several other stations, including campus stations such as Voice of Wits (VoW) and Tuks FM, and community stations such as Jozi FM and Radio Grahamstown (Mtimde, 2024:17). These emerging stations later convened at a workshop at Chapman's Peak, where they debated questions such as "who controls community radio" and how community ownership should be operationalised (Mtimde, 2024:17). It was at this workshop that the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) was launched in 1993, creating a national network for community radio advocacy and coordination (Mtimde, 2024:17).

Despite growing momentum, the legal recognition of Bush Radio lagged behind its grassroots legitimacy. Mtimde (2024:17) notes that UWC granted Bush Radio permission to apply for a broadcasting licence, but the application was rejected twice by the Department of Home Affairs, which at the time held responsibility for broadcasting. In response, Bush Radio embarked on its first unlicensed broadcast on 25 April 1993 as part of the students' Defiance Campaign (Mtimde, 2024:17; Osunkunle, 2013:48). Four months later, the station organised a protest calling on the government to free Bush Radio's airwaves and grant it a licence (Osunkunle, 2013:48). Although this demand was initially rejected and the station's equipment was later confiscated by the authorities, temporarily halting its operations (Banda & Bosch, cited in Osunkunle, 2013:48; Mtimde, 2024:17), Bush Radio ultimately survived and went on to become a licensed community station. As Ibrahim (2004:40) observes, Bush Radio continues to broadcast today in areas such as the Cape Flats and maintains links with UWC, symbolising the resilience of community media initiatives that originated under conditions of repression.

With the advent of democracy in 1994 and the subsequent liberalisation of the airwaves, community radio in South Africa expanded rapidly. Bosch (2012:427) notes that community radio became particularly visible after the country's first democratic elections, when licensing frameworks were opened up and community broadcasting was formally recognised as a distinct sector. From that period onwards, community radio was no longer confined to clandestine or semi-legal experiments: it became possible for communities across the country to apply for licences and establish stations that reflected their own languages, cultures and development priorities (Bosch, 2014:427). Since then, the sector has grown considerably; current estimates suggest that there are now over 200 licensed community radio stations in South Africa, with new licences granted periodically (Nkoala & Motsaathebe, 2024:2; Mtimde, 2024:12).

In summary, community radio in South Africa has evolved from underground initiatives challenging apartheid control of the airwaves to a recognised and extensive third tier of the broadcasting system. Its development has been shaped by activism, international solidarity, training and advocacy networks, and subsequent policy and regulatory reforms. This historical trajectory provides an important backdrop for understanding contemporary community radio stations such as Kurara FM, whose operations and developmental aspirations are rooted in, but also constrained by, this complex legacy.

2.4. Policy and institutional context of community radio in South Africa

As noted earlier, community radio in South Africa emerged directly from the recommendations made at the Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves Conference held in August 1991 (Ibrahim, 2004:40). Building on the momentum of Jabulani!, a follow-up conference was convened a month later, in September 1991, at the then University of Bophuthatswana (now North-West University) (Osunkunle, 2013:46). The purpose of this second conference was to advance specific issues raised at Jabulani!, including policy formation, media monitoring and the establishment of a broadcasting development network (Olorunnisola & Osunkunle, cited by Osunkunle, 2013:46). Together, these conferences helped to translate the broad ideal of “freeing the airwaves” into more concrete institutional and regulatory proposals that would later underpin the formal recognition and licensing of community radio. One of the key recommendations arising from these deliberations was the creation of an independent regulator to oversee the transition from state-controlled broadcasting to a more pluralistic system.

2.4.1. Independent Broadcasting Authority

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was thus established in terms of the IBA Act of 1993 and formally came into existence on 30 March 1994 (Bosch, 2014:427; Bosch, 2018:5). It was proposed that, during the transition to democracy, the state should “surrender control of the airwaves” to an independent body that could licence and regulate broadcasters at arm’s length from government (Osunkunle, 2013:46). The IBA was tasked with issuing broadcasting licences, monitoring compliance with licence conditions and broader policy objectives, and overseeing the transformation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) from an apartheid-era propaganda machine into a more credible public service broadcaster (Osunkunle, 2013:35, 46; Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2020:3). In line with its mandate, the IBA awarded the first batch of community radio licences between 1994 and 1995 (Bosch, 2018:5). These early licences were typically granted for one-year periods and had to be renewed annually (Bosch, 2018:5; Wabwire, 2013:42). For stations waiting for full community licences,

the IBA could issue one-month “special event” licences that allowed temporary broadcasting, often linked to elections, festivals or specific campaigns (Bosch, 2018:5). By 1996, the IBA began issuing licences with a four-year validity period, signalling a move towards greater institutional stability for community stations and permitting more sustained development of local broadcasting infrastructures (Wabwire, 2013:42). These regulatory changes also coincided with the more formal differentiation of types of community broadcasters, including geographic, campus, religious and cultural stations (Wabwire, 2013:42).

2.4.2. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa

As the communication and broadcasting environment became more complex, with convergence between telecommunications and broadcasting, regulatory structures were again reconfigured. In the early 2000s, the IBA was merged with the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA), and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) was established in terms of the ICASA Act 13 of 2000 (Osunkunle, 2013:37; ICASA, 2024). ICASA inherited the functions of both predecessors and remains, to date, the official regulator of broadcasting, electronic communications and telecommunications in South Africa (ICASA, 2024). Its responsibilities include issuing licences to broadcasters and communications service providers, developing regulations, planning and managing the radio frequency spectrum, and acting as a watchdog to protect consumers from unfair business practices and poor-quality services (ICASA, 2024). ICASA is also mandated to promote access to basic communications services at affordable prices and to ensure that broadcasting and communications systems contribute to broader national goals of democracy, development and social inclusion (ICASA, 2024). Community radio stations, including Kurara FM, thus operate within a regulatory environment shaped by ICASA’s licensing, monitoring and spectrum management functions.

2.4.3. Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) also played a significant role in shaping the policy environment that favoured community media. According to the South African Government (2024), the TRC highlighted the apartheid state’s manipulation of media and communication systems and recommended that the post-apartheid state support the development of more diverse and inclusive media. The commission called for “a multiplicity of media voices” and urged the government to establish a legislative environment and state subsidies that would encourage the growth of grassroots publications and local broadcasting stations (South African Government, 2024). These recommendations reinforced the policy rationale for community broadcasting as a means of redressing historical imbalances in media

ownership, access and representation. Community radio was thus not only a product of activist initiatives and international solidarity (as seen in the histories of Bush Radio and Radio Zibonele) but also a response to formal transitional justice processes that recognised the need for more democratic communication structures.

2.5. National Community Radio Forum

Complementing these regulatory and policy developments, the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) was established in 1993 as a membership-based organisation to lobby and advocate for community broadcasting and to provide a platform for collaboration, training and mutual support among community stations (Ibrahim, 2004:41; NCRF, 2025). The NCRF played a key role in articulating the interests of nascent community broadcasters in policy debates, engaging with regulators and government, and assisting communities to set up their own stations. Ibrahim (2004:41) notes that the forum helped to train “a number of communities” in establishing and running community radio, thereby contributing to the rapid growth of the sector after 1994. Today, the NCRF remains a national, membership-driven organisation comprising community radio stations and affiliated groups and continues to advocate for policy frameworks and resource allocations that support the sustainability and independence of community broadcasting (NCRF, 2025).

2.6. Media Development and Diversity Agency

The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) represent another crucial institutional pillar in the community media landscape. Although the impetus for MDDA can be traced to earlier policy debates and the TRC’s recommendations, the agency was formally established in 2003 under the MDDA Act No. 14 of 2002 and began operating on 29 January 2004 (MDDA, 2024). The MDDA is a statutory development agency mandated to promote and ensure media development and diversity in South Africa (MDDA, 2024). Working in partnership with the South African Government and major print and broadcast companies, the agency supports the development of community and small commercial media through financial assistance, capacity-building and other forms of institutional support (MDDA, 2024). The MDDA emphasises its role in encouraging ownership, control, and access to media by historically disadvantaged communities as well as by the historically diminished indigenous language and cultural groups (South African Government, 2023). In practice, this has included funding start-up costs, equipment, training and operational expenses for community radio, community television and grassroots print and digital outlets.

Over its first two decades, the MDDA has funded approximately 586 community media projects, including 321 community broadcasting initiatives (radio and television) across the country (South African Government, 2023). These interventions have enabled previously

disadvantaged communities to establish their own media platforms, gain access to locally relevant news and information, and develop skills in media production and management. MDDA support typically combines financial grants with training programmes to ensure that community media personnel are equipped to operate and sustain their outlets. Kurara FM, the focus of this study, is one of the community radio stations that has benefited from MDDA funding. In 2016, the station received R1 861 211.44 from the MDDA to “cover centralised broadcast studio procurement”, thereby strengthening its technical capacity and infrastructure (MDDA, 2016). This support underscores the extent to which Kurara FM is embedded within national efforts to promote media diversity and to extend broadcasting services to historically underserved areas.

The South African Government has further signalled its commitment to community broadcasting through initiatives such as the Community Broadcasting Support Programme (CBSP). Beyond the resources channelled through the MDDA, the government, through structures such as the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), the MDDA and the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA), has invested in various capacity-building programmes for community media (South African Government, 2024). Under the CBSP, the state spent more than R600 million on community broadcasting between 2002 and 2021, reflecting sustained public investment in this third tier of the broadcasting system (South African Government, 2024). These funds have supported infrastructure, training, content development and other aspects of community broadcasting, reinforcing the view that community media are integral to democratic communication and local development.

In light of the foregoing, the policy and institutional context of community radio in South Africa is arguably a product of intersecting forces including activist struggles to free the airwaves; international advocacy for community broadcasting; post-apartheid regulatory reforms (IBA, ICASA); transitional justice recommendations (TRC); sectoral organising through the NCRF; and targeted state support via the MDDA and CBSP. Community radio was explicitly envisaged as a mechanism to redress the power imbalances created by apartheid, to free the media from narrow party-political control and to provide marginalised communities with alternative platforms for information and voice (Osunkunle, 2013:46; Ibrahim, 2004:40). It is within this dense policy and institutional framework that stations such as Kurara FM were established, funded and regulated, and it is against this backdrop that their claims to promote social inclusion and local development must be critically examined.

2.7. Key features of community radio

Community radio is underpinned by principles that distinguish it from commercial and public broadcasting. Lewis (cited in Bosch, 2013:429) identifies three foundational tenets namely *access*, *participation* and *self-management* which together define community radio's role as a democratic and development-oriented medium. These principles reflect the broader ethos of community media, which prioritises inclusivity, local relevance and the empowerment of marginalised voices rather than profit or purely audience-maximisation logics. In this study, these tenets provide an important yardstick for assessing whether and how Kurara FM functions as a genuinely community-driven station in Kuruman.

2.7.1. Access

Access refers to the ability of community members not only to receive content but to engage directly with the station and its producers. Bosch (2013:429) emphasises that listeners should be able to "interact directly with producers of message", for example by phoning in, sending SMSs, using social media platforms where available, or visiting the station. Berrigan, cited in Howley (2010:16), conceptualises access as the availability of communication tools and resources for members of the local community, a definition that applies equally to community radio as a specific form of community media. Howley (2010:16) further frames access as the possibility for community members to use a platform through which they can express themselves on a range of topics "from news and opinion to entertainment and education". In the South African context, access also carries a particular historical weight: in the post-apartheid era it symbolises the reclamation of media spaces by communities especially Black South Africans who were previously excluded from platforms that reflected their interests or languages (Tucker, 2013:394; Bosch, 2013:427). Under apartheid, Black communities had limited access to media that spoke to their lived realities (Bosch, 2013:427); community radio thus emerged as a corrective, offering more direct access to both production processes and locally relevant content. For the present study, the notion of access raises concrete questions about whether Kurara FM is equally accessible to all segments of its geographically dispersed audience, including remote villages and indigenous communities such as the †Khomani.

2.7.2. Participation

Participation involves the active involvement of ordinary community members in the station's operations and strategic direction. Lewis (cited in Bosch, 2013:429) highlights participation as a core principle that moves community radio beyond a simple "audience" model towards collaborative production and governance. Berrigan, cited in Howley (2010:16), defines

participation as engagement in the processes of content production as well as in the “operations and oversight of media organisations”. Bosch (2013:429) notes that there is no single, universally agreed definition of access and participation; for some, access may mean being able to walk into the station and use its resources, while for others it may mean being able to tune into a station that broadcasts in a language they understand and covers issues they find relevant. Similarly, participation can range from calling in to comment on the topic of the day to serving on a station board or programming committee. Tucker (2013:394) argues that community radio should promote participation by ensuring that ordinary members of the community are involved in “all elements” of the station’s operations, including management, planning, education and production. This implies that participation is not limited to symbolic on-air presence but extends to decision-making power over how the station is run and what it prioritises. In this dissertation, participation is examined empirically through, for example, Kurara FM’s programming formats, its governance arrangements and the ways in which marginalised groups are included—or excluded—in both on-air and off-air processes.

2.7.3. Self-management

This principle means that decision-making authority ultimately lies with the community itself rather than external owners, the state or commercial investors. Bosch (2013:429) links self-management to governance arrangements that allow community members, especially those from marginalised groups, to influence policy-setting and oversight. In principle, this entails structures such as community-elected boards, open general meetings and transparent accountability mechanisms through which residents can hold station leadership to account. Self-management is therefore a safeguard against elite capture and helps ensure that community radio stations remain responsive to their constituencies rather than drifting towards commercial or political agendas. At the same time, practitioners and scholars caution that self-management is often aspirational; in practice, unequal capacities, resource constraints and local power hierarchies can limit whose voices count in governance processes. One of the concerns of this study is to explore to what extent Kurara FM’s governance and management arrangements reflect substantive community self-management, and whose interests are most visible in the station’s priorities and decision-making.

Building on these normative principles, Tucker (2013:394) identifies additional features that operationalise the philosophy of community radio in everyday practice. These are *training*, *non-profit orientation*, *community ownership*, *volunteering* and *localism*. These features give concrete institutional and organisational form to the abstract ideals of access, participation and self-management, and they provide further analytical lenses for interrogating Kurara FM’s practices.

2.7.4. Training

Training is essential because community radio is meant to be run by community members rather than professional broadcasters. For Tucker (2013:394), meaningful participation requires that local people be equipped with skills “both in terms of content and radio production and engineering, and in the physical maintenance of the community radio equipment”. Training enables community members to script, produce and present programmes, maintain technical infrastructure and engage critically with information, thereby avoiding over-reliance on a small group of “experts” who could dominate the station. In the case of Kurara FM, the nature, scope and beneficiaries of training initiatives provide important indicators of whether capacity-building is strengthening broad-based participation or primarily consolidating control within a narrow cadre of staff and volunteers.

2.7.5. Non-profit orientation

Community radio’s non-profit orientation is another defining feature. Community stations are mandated to operate as public-service media rather than commercial enterprises. They typically rely on a mix of donor funding, limited advertising, sponsorships, fundraising events and small grants, with any surplus expected to be reinvested into the station or community projects rather than distributed as profit (Tucker, 2013:394; Mtimde, 2024:12; Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002:70). This financial model is intended to protect stations from commercial pressures that might push them towards purely entertainment-driven content and away from developmental or public-interest programming. However, it also makes them vulnerable to funding instability and donor conditionalities, which can in turn affect their autonomy. For Kurara FM, the study considers how its funding model including support from bodies such as the MDDA shapes its programming choices, advocacy capacity and ability to prioritise marginalised voices.

2.7.6. Community ownership

Community ownership denotes that stations are “for the community, by the community”. This does not necessarily mean that every individual holds a formal share, but rather that station structures reflect and are accountable to the community in whose name they operate. Tucker (2013:394) suggests that community ownership can be institutionalised through non-profit organisation (NPO) structures, community-elected boards of directors and membership subscription schemes that give local residents a stake in the station. Ownership in this sense is both symbolic and practical: it conveys that the station exists to serve community needs and provides mechanisms through which community members can influence priorities and hold

leadership accountable. In this dissertation, Kurara FM's ownership structure and formal relationship with its licence-holder community are examined as part of understanding whether the station's claim to be "the voice of the people" is borne out in practice.

2.7.7. Volunteering

This is closely tied to non-profit status and ownership. Because community radio does not exist to generate profits and often operates on tight budgets, much of the work is carried out by volunteers who donate their time for programming, technical upkeep and station management (Tucker, 2013:395). These volunteers, drawn from the communities where the stations are based, "may maintain the station, build the station, produce and host programs, or manage the station" (Tucker, 2013:395). Volunteering can deepen local buy-in and help cultivate a sense of collective ownership, but it can also create challenges related to turnover, skills gaps and sustainability if volunteers are not adequately supported. The study therefore pays attention to Kurara FM's volunteer base in terms of who volunteers, under what conditions, and with what forms of recognition in order to understand how labour, commitment and power are distributed within the station.

2.7.8. Localism

Finally, localism is at the heart of community radio's identity. Tucker (2013:395) stresses that community stations are local in orientation and are intended to support local communities by celebrating local talent, focusing on local public affairs and news, and reflecting local cultures and languages. Although community radio may include national or global content, its primary task is to root such content in local realities, making it relevant to listeners' daily lives. Localism is therefore not just about geographic coverage; it is about ensuring that programming reflects local priorities, voices and forms of knowledge. In relation to Kurara FM, the study explores how the station balances coverage of local development issues, provincial and national agendas, and whether its content genuinely reflects the concerns of scattered villages and marginalised groups in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District.

In the context of this study, then, these features are not merely descriptive; they form a diagnostic framework for analysing Kurara FM's practices. They guide questions such as: to what extent does Kurara FM provide genuine access to all community members, particularly historically marginalised groups such as the †Khomani? How effectively does it foster participation in content creation, decision-making and station management, and what barriers remain? Does Kurara FM's model of ownership, volunteering and governance reflect substantive community control, or do underlying power dynamics limit grassroots influence?

Furthermore, how does its commitment to localism and developmental objectives intersect with the practical challenges of funding, regulation and sustainability? These questions link directly to the specific research questions and objectives formulated in Chapter One and provide the criteria against which Kurara FM's contribution to social change is evaluated in the findings chapters.

It is therefore pertinent to turn next to empirical and conceptual work on community radio, advocacy and social change, with particular attention to participation, empowerment and the inclusion of marginalised groups, as these themes are central to understanding Kurara FM's role in Kuruman. At the same time, while community radio is distinguished by its participatory ethos and local ownership, it remains a form of broadcast media and is governed by many of the same dynamics that shape other mass media. As a broadcast medium, it can be understood through theoretical frameworks that explain how media influence public agendas and social change elaborated in Chapter Three (Wallack *et al.*, 1993). For now, it is sufficient to note that media advocacy perspectives position community radio not only as a participatory platform but also as a strategic instrument for shaping public discourse, amplifying marginalised voices and mobilising communities around local development priorities. The following section on community radio and advocacy thus begins to bridge these defining features with the broader communicative role of community radio in influencing social change agendas, setting up the analytical lens through which Kurara FM's practices are interrogated in the rest of the dissertation.

2.8. Community radio, advocacy and social change

Having outlined the historical development, policy context and key features of community radio in South Africa, this section turns to the specific relationship between community radio, advocacy and social change. In development communication debates, it can be argued that community radio is not only envisaged as a platform for access, participation and voice but also as a strategic resource that communities can mobilise to frame issues, influence public agendas and press for institutional or policy change. In other words, this study argues that community radio is both a communicative space and an advocacy instrument, capable of linking everyday lived experience with broader struggles over resources, recognition and rights. This is particularly pertinent in the context of Kurara FM, which as discussed in Chapter 1, positions itself as as a platform for local development and social transformation in a historically marginalised community.

The relationship between community radio, advocacy and social change can be best understood by first examining how scholars and practitioners conceptualise community radio and advocacy, and how stations have been used to support campaigns around health,

livelihoods, governance and service deliver. It is also important to illustrate these conceptual debates through empirical cases of community radio advocacy with particular attention to experiences in African and other Global South contexts that provide comparative lenses for the Kurara FM case. This provides a conceptual and empirical grounding for analysing, in later chapters, whether and how Kurara FM's programmes move beyond information provision to act as catalysts for advocacy and social change in and around Kuruman, and they prepare the way for the more formal theoretical discussion in Chapter 3.

2.8.1. Community radio and advocacy

Community radio has long been conceptualised as more than a channel for information dissemination. It is a communicative space in which marginalised communities can articulate grievances, negotiate identities, and mobilise around shared development priorities. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2001) describe community radio as a medium that turns listeners into protagonists by inviting grassroots participation in both content and agenda setting, thereby enabling local actors to challenge structural inequalities and influence decision-making processes that affect their lives. In post-apartheid South Africa, community radio emerged as part of a broader project to democratise the airwaves and open discursive spaces to communities historically excluded from public communication under apartheid (Bosch, 2005; Olorunnisola, 2002). Within this terrain, Kurara FM's mandate to serve scattered and marginalised communities in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District places it squarely within a tradition that views community radio as a vehicle for advocacy, empowerment and social change.

From the perspective of development communication, community radio is situated at the intersection of what can be termed as 'communication for' and 'communication about' development. It transmits information about programmes, policies and opportunities, but it also provides a forum for communities to debate the meaning of development and to contest whose priorities are foregrounded. Tucker (2013) argues that community radio often operates in a hybrid space between political theory and development practice. Here, it is used both as a strategic solution to specific development problems and as a means of expanding democratic participation in public life. This dual role is salient in rural areas like Kuruman where communities face historical dispossession, spatial fragmentation and limited access to mainstream media. Against this backdrop, community radio's potential contribution is not limited to relaying messages from government or NGOs. Rather, it lies in enabling residents to define their own issues, articulate demands, and challenge institutional actors. As outlined in Chapter 1, this study is centrally concerned with whether Kurara FM in fact fulfils this role and how community members themselves perceive its contribution to social change.

This section therefore examines how community radio functions as an advocacy medium, how it supports social change through information dissemination and voice, how it enhances community agency and civic engagement, and how participatory mechanisms both enable and constrain these roles. These debates provide an essential backdrop for understanding Kurara FM's practices analysed in subsequent chapters and connect directly to the theoretical lenses of media advocacy and participatory development communication discussed in Chapter 3. By positioning Kurara FM within the wider scholarly conversation on community radio, the section also clarifies the conceptual benchmarks against which the station's practices are assessed in the empirical chapters.

2.8.2. Community radio as an advocacy medium

Community radio is widely recognised as a key instrument for development-oriented advocacy, particularly in rural and marginalised contexts. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada's UNESCO Community radio handbook (2001) characterises community radio as a tool for communicating for development, highlighting its capacity to raise awareness, stimulate public debate and mobilise collective action around local issues such as health, agriculture, gender equality and environmental protection. Rather than being a neutral conduit, community radio shapes how issues are framed and whose perspectives are heard. In this sense, it performs a political function even when its content appears primarily informational. Wallack's (1994) notion of media advocacy is useful here. He defines media advocacy as the strategic use of mass media to support community organising and policy change, a concept that aligns closely with the aspirations and practices of many community radio stations.

Empirical work from Ghana, Tanzania and elsewhere illustrates how community radio stations serve as advocacy platforms that connect citizens, civil society and state actors. Al-Hassan, Andani and Abdul-Malik's (2011) study of Simli Radio in northern Ghana shows how the station facilitates dialogue on local governance, sanitation, agriculture and education, thereby creating an interface between "duty bearers and rights holders" and enabling communities to hold local authorities accountable. In their analysis, programmes such as public forums and call-in shows did not simply provide information; they served as arenas where listeners could directly question officials and demand explanations for poor service delivery. Similarly, Abdulai *et al.* (2021) demonstrate how community broadcasters in Ghana use radio to translate climate-related information into locally relevant messages, supporting farmers to adapt their practices and to advocate for institutional support in the face of climate variability. These initiatives illustrate how community radio can function as a communication infrastructure for grassroots advocacy.

In the South African context, Bosch's (2005; 2010) work on Bush Radio in Cape Town shows how community radio can foreground issues of youth culture, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS and local politics, often positioning itself as a voice for the voiceless in highly unequal urban environments. Olorunnisola (2002) further argues that community radio in post-apartheid South Africa has contributed to widening the public sphere, enabling more inclusive forms of deliberation beyond elite national media. He notes that stations frequently act as mediating institutions between communities and the state, particularly in areas where other channels of communication are weak. These insights are important for Kurara FM, which similarly positions itself as a bridge between government, civil society and rural communities in Kuruman (see Chapter 1). The question that underpins this thesis is whether such advocacy roles are genuinely rooted in grassroots participation or whether they risk being constrained by funding dependencies, regulatory frameworks and local power hierarchies.

This thesis argues that advocacy through community radio can take multiple forms such as agenda-setting around neglected issues, framing community perspectives in ways that challenge dominant discourses, and enabling communities to pressure public and private institutions for change. In some cases, advocacy may be direct, as when stations run explicit campaigns on service delivery, corruption or environmental degradation. In other instances, it may be more subtle, embedded in programme choices, language use and the inclusion of marginal voices. For Kurara FM, the empirical analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 asks, for example, whether the station provides sustained coverage of developmental issues in Kuruman, whether it enables marginalised groups such as the †Khomani to frame issues in their own terms, and how local officials respond when issues are raised on air.

2.8.3. Information dissemination, local voice and social change

A core contribution of community radio lies in its capacity to disseminate information in accessible formats while simultaneously amplifying local voices. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2001) note that community radio is particularly effective where literacy levels are low and communities are geographically dispersed, as oral broadcasting in local languages overcomes barriers to accessing written information. Information about government programmes, agricultural innovations, health services or educational opportunities can reach audiences who might otherwise be excluded. Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) show that Simli Radio's use of local languages and participatory formats such as phone-ins and community-based producers enhanced listeners' knowledge of agriculture, hygiene, local governance and cultural practices, contributing to tangible livelihood improvements.

Beyond knowledge transfer, community radio has been linked to broader processes of social change. Drawing on a wide range of studies, Rahman and Al-Azm (2023) conceptualise social change as shifts in social structures, power relations and collective practices that improve the well-being and agency of disadvantaged groups. Community radio contributes to such change when it does more than simply broadcast information. It must create dialogic spaces where community members can voice concerns, contest dominant narratives and co-produce solutions (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001; Tucker, 2013). In contexts where mainstream media tend to marginalise rural voices and under-report local struggles, community radio offers a counter-public sphere in which alternative narratives can be articulated and circulated.

Recent empirical work in Africa reinforces this claim. Abdulai *et al.* (2021) found that community radio programmes on climate change in rural Ghana not only provided technical information but also opened space for farmers to share experiential knowledge and collectively pressure local authorities to support climate adaptation measures. Asuman and Diedong (2019), examining community radio in Ghana's Fanteakwa District, show that locally produced programmes and interactive formats allow multiple, often marginalised, voices to enter public debate on development priorities, thereby disrupting top-down communication flows. UNESCO's (2021) manual on gender-sensitive programming likewise documents how community stations, when consciously inclusive, can raise awareness about gender inequality and promote shifts in social norms by giving women and gender-diverse groups sustained airtime.

These insights resonate strongly with Kurara FM's stated aim of broadcasting in Setswana, Afrikaans and English to reach diverse communities in the Northern Cape. In a province characterised by scattered settlements and limited media infrastructure, the station's potential contribution to social change depends on whether its programming genuinely brings local voices into conversation with development information, rather than treating listeners as passive recipients. One of the tasks of this study is therefore to examine the extent to which Kurara FM combines information dissemination with empowerment through dialogic engagement.

2.9. Empowerment through community agency and civic engagement

Empowerment in the context of community radio involves strengthening people's capacity to define their own problems, articulate demands, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that shape their lives. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2001) argue that community radio can foster such empowerment when communities are involved not only as audiences but also as owners, managers, producers and on-air contributors. Their handbook emphasises that stations should strive to build local management capacity, train community

members in production skills, and facilitate participatory governance structures such as community-elected boards and open general meetings. When these conditions are met, radio becomes not just a medium about the community but a medium in the hands of the community.

Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) show that Simli Radio enabled community members to gain confidence and organisational skills by participating as community-based producers, which helped them to engage more effectively with local government structures. Tucker (2013) conceptualises this as a shift from viewing listeners as targets of development messages to recognising them as political agents capable of critiquing policies and shaping collective agendas. In her analysis, community radio can nurture citizen subjects who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and who have the communicative resources to demand accountability. UNESCO's (2001; 2021) materials on community and gender-sensitive radio similarly stress that training, mentorship and participatory planning processes are crucial for building local capacity so that community members can eventually take leadership roles within the station and beyond.

Such empowerment is not only individual but also relational. Community radio can strengthen social networks, build trust and facilitate civic engagement, for example by hosting debates with local leaders, organising call-in programmes on service delivery, or providing information on citizens' rights and entitlements (Al-Hassan *et al.*, 2011; Adebayo, 2022). In some cases, stations have supported the formation of listener clubs or community groups that meet offline to discuss broadcast content and plan collective action. These groups, in turn, can become important actors in local governance processes, representing community interests in engagements with municipalities or service providers.

For this study empowerment is particularly salient given the historical marginalisation and spatial fragmentation of communities in Kuruman and the wider John Taolo Gaetsewe District. If the community radio governance structures, training initiatives and programming formats enable local residents to set the agenda and to speak back to power, the station can arguably contribute to enhanced agency and civic participation. Conversely, if decision-making is concentrated among a narrow elite of volunteers, funders or political actors, the empowering potential of community radio may be significantly curtailed. This study investigates these dynamics by analysing both station-level practices and community perceptions, paying particular attention to whose voices are most audible on Kurara FM and whose remain marginal.

2.10. Mechanisms of community participation in community radio

Participation in community radio occurs through multiple, interlinked mechanisms that range from everyday listenership to more formalised governance roles. Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2001) describe practical modalities such as listener clubs, community correspondents, open-door studio policies, village-level programme planning meetings, and participatory content production where community members act as co-producers rather than mere informants. These modalities operationalise the normative principles of access and participation discussed earlier. In practice, they enable residents to suggest topics, provide feedback on programmes, share local knowledge, and collectively evaluate the station's performance.

Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) document how Simli Radio used community-based producers as liaisons who gathered stories, facilitated discussions and encouraged participation in local languages, thereby deepening the station's rootedness in everyday community life. Tucker (2013) argues that participation should extend to all elements of the station's operations, including management, editorial decision-making, education and training, and not only on-air contributions. UNESCO's (2021) manual on gender-sensitive practices in community radio emphasises that inclusive participation requires attention to internal policies, for example, gender-balanced leadership and anti-harassment measures, programming choices such as whose voices are prioritised and structural barriers such as time poverty, mobility constraints and linguistic exclusion that may prevent women and other marginalised groups from active involvement.

Studies from Ghana and Kenya point to specific participatory mechanisms that link community radio to development outcomes. Asuman and Diedong (2019) identify public forums, interactive programmes and community call-in segments as spaces where citizens debate development issues, exchange information and collectively pressure authorities to deliver services. Ngugi (2015), in a case study of Koch FM in Nairobi, shows how community members co-produce programmes on crime, unemployment and health, using the station as an organising node for community patrols, youth cultural activities and engagement with municipal officials. These examples illustrate how specific mechanisms of participation can translate into concrete civic action and, importantly, how radio can function as an anchor for other forms of organisation.

In light of these insights, the present study asks how Kurara FM structures opportunities for participation in its programming and governance. Do community members participate primarily as callers, studio guests and audience members, or are they also involved in setting priorities, evaluating programmes and overseeing station operations? How inclusive are these mechanisms of participation in a context marked by socio-economic inequality, linguistic

diversity and historical exclusion? These questions are central to the analysis presented in Chapters 5 and speak directly to the participatory development assumptions outlined in the next chapter.

2.11. Challenges and tensions in public participation

While the ideals of participation, access and empowerment are central to community radio discourse, empirical studies highlight multiple challenges that complicate their realisation. Bosch (2010) observes that South African community stations often struggle to balance participatory goals with professionalisation pressures, constrained funding and regulatory requirements, which can lead to a drift towards more top-down, semi-commercial programming. In some cases, the need to attract advertisers or meet audience ratings targets can push stations towards music-heavy schedules and away from more demanding participatory or advocacy content. Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) similarly note that in the case of Simli Radio, leadership instability, resource constraints and infrastructural problems (such as poor roads and power outages) limited the station's ability to sustain participatory practices across its wide rural catchment area.

Power imbalances within communities also shape who actually participates. Oduaran and Nelson (2019) show that even where community radio aims to serve women and families in South Africa, patriarchal norms and gatekeeping practices can limit women's influence over content and governance. UNESCO's (2021) gender-sensitive programming manual documents similar patterns in India, where women's voices remain under-represented on air and in management despite formal commitments to inclusivity. These findings show why it is important not to treat the community as if it were homogeneous. What we call the community is not simply already there. It is shaped by power relations that enable some people to speak as the community, while others are spoken for or not heard at all. Foucault's idea of power/knowledge reminds us that media spaces such as community radio help to define what can be said about 'who the community is', 'what its problems are', and 'what counts as a reasonable solution'(Foucault, 1980). Power works not only by excluding people, but also by fixing the terms and truths through which their realities are described (Foucault, 1980). Hall's work on representation adds that media do not just mirror a pre-existing community, but actively construct it by selecting particular images, stories and speaking positions, and leaving others in the background (Hall, 1997).

From this perspective, class, gender, ethnicity and age are not just background descriptors. Rather, they strongly influence whose concerns are prioritised and whose voices are taken seriously. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital helps to explain why people with more

education, confidence in dominant languages, or recognised positions in local institutions are more likely to be invited onto programmes and treated as credible, while poorer, less educated or socially marginalised residents find it harder to be heard (Bourdieu, 1991). Spivak's famous question "Can the subaltern speak?" may also be useful here. Even when a station claims to give voice to the voiceless, those at the very margins may still appear mainly as topics of discussion, rather than as people who speak for themselves in their own terms (Spivak, 1988). In the case of Kurara FM, this means that any claim to represent the Kuruman community must be examined carefully in terms of which groups are most audible on air, whose priorities shape the agenda, and how long-standing inequalities along lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity and generation continue to affect who has voice and visibility. Without conscious strategies to include the most marginalised, community radio can inadvertently reproduce existing hierarchies.

Funding and donor dependencies further complicate participation. Studies across Africa indicate that community radio stations often rely on project-based funding or government subsidies tied to particular policy agendas, which can skew programming towards donor priorities and away from contentious local issues (da Costa, 2012; Adebayo, 2022). In some cases, political actors attempt to capture community radio as a vehicle for party mobilisation rather than community advocacy, thereby constraining critical debate (Olorunnisola, 2002). These dynamics call for a critical reading of "community ownership" that takes seriously questions about who controls resources, sets agendas and benefits from the station's visibility and networks.

Technological and infrastructural challenges add another layer of complexity. Weak signal coverage, unreliable electricity, limited access to telephony or internet, and the cost of participation (for example, calling into a live show) can all limit who is able to participate and how often. In geographically vast and sparsely populated areas such as the Northern Cape, these infrastructural factors are particularly salient. They may, for instance, mean that residents in remote villages can listen to Kurara FM but cannot easily interact with the station or attend in-person events, raising questions about differentiated access to participatory opportunities within the station's licence area.

These challenges are highly relevant for Kurara FM, which has benefited from funding by the MDDA and operates in a context where government, mining companies and other external actors play significant roles in local development. The extent to which Kurara FM can maintain editorial independence, sustain participatory mechanisms, and amplify marginalised voices despite financial and political pressures is a key concern explored in the empirical chapters. Recognising these tensions prevents a superficial view of community radio and aligns with

this study's critical interrogation of whether Kurara FM reproduces or disrupts hierarchical communication patterns in Kuruman's fragmented social landscape.

2.12. Community radio and social change

Social change refers to a change in attitude, behaviour or way of living leading to improved quality of life and sustainability. Accordingly, Rahman and Al-Azm (2023:1) states that social change "involves a cultural transformation often as part of an adaptive response to an ever-changing world around us." In addition, it could be argued that social change challenges existing cultural norms and values in our communities (Rahman & Al-Azm, 2023:1). It is, therefore, the role of community radio in this context is to amplify the voices of the marginalised communities. In so doing, community radio challenges mainstream media by offering marginalised communities a platform to have their voices heard, to speak about social issues relevant to their communities. Furthermore, community radio as a tool for social change entails using communicative strategies and tactics to transform and improve social conditions of the communities where these stations are based. In most cases, as Rahman and Al-Azm (2023:1) stated, these transformations are often in areas not limited to "education, economic development and employment patterns."

Many scholars studied the impact of community radio on social change in areas such as food production, food security and agriculture (see Abdulai *et al.*, 2021; Asuman & Moodley, 2023; & UNESCO, 2021). These scholars have revealed that community radio has been effective in broadcasting information about these areas thus influencing social change. The studies revealed that communities adopted to new farming methods as the stations continued to broadcast information on new farming skills (see Abdulai *et al.*, 2021; Asuman & Moodley, 2023; & UNESCO, 2021). Asuman & Moodley (2023) study found that farmers' productivity increased as the community adapted to advanced farming techniques the community station aired, as a result, food become less expensive.

As argued, social change challenges existing cultural norms, therefore, community radio as a tool for social change has been effective in amplifying women voices in societies where women previously did not have a voice. As indicated in a study by UNESCO (2021) Alfaz-e-Mewat community radio, has created a space for women to receive and impart information. In addition, it is noted that the community has shifted from "traditional salutation of farmer brothers to include women farmers" following the radio station' support for female farmers. Alfaz-e-Mewat female farmers are currently recognised as equal partners in farming. Similarly, Al-hassen *et al.*, (2011:3) noted that Simli Radio was able to amplify women voices in its programmes in a community where female voices were unheard as part of the tradition. This

resulted in an increased “acceptance of women’s views in matters that not only affect the family but the community as well”, (Al-Hassen *et al.*, 2011:3).

Community radio as a platform for social change needs to help transform the community. However, in its efforts to achieve desirable change, the stations must work with its community. These stations need to empower the community to address their issues and take necessary steps to achieve desired outcomes. A notable example is highlighted in UNESCO (2021) study, where a community was able to raise funds for the community to have clean drinking water. This was after the community radio station campaigned for safe drinking water (UNESCO, 2021:47). Accordingly, UNESCO (2021:47) noted that listeners contributed money towards the water project. Consequently, “six rooftop tanks were put in place and simple cleaning water purification methods were adopted.” Resulting in 200 households accessing clean and safe drinking water (UNESCO, 2021:47). This shows the effectiveness of community radio as a tool for social change and its ability to mobilise the community for social change projects.

2.13. Broadcast to action

Broadcast to action is a strategy community radio stations use to prompt the community to take specific actions regarding a particular problem, issue or area of interest. This is reflected in UNESCO (2021) study, where a community radio station broadcasts agricultural information for its farming community. According to UNESCO (2021) the station brings in experts on their shows to share farming tips and techniques, from this show community members are able to gather tips to use on their own farming projects. Consequently, UNESCO (2021:71) noted that one of the community members became a successful farmer due to the agricultural programme. In addition, the same farmer would be invited to the station to also share some of their ideas, techniques and methods they use; resulting in other farmer adapting to the same practices (UNESCO, 2021: 72). In addition, more farmers came through to the station to share their farming tips as successful farmers (UNESCO, 2021: 73). Consequently, the radio station offered the community a platform to engage with one another, to share information, problems and their successes as local farmers.

Community radio has proven to be proficient in broadcasting health-related information to prompt community members to take proper actions towards their health and their children’s. According to Pavarala and Malik (2021:204) a community radio station in India was awarded a national award for promoting healthy living using local rich nutritional food. This shows the effectiveness of community radio in broadcasting health-related information and preserving local tradition.

Ngugi (2015:4) noted that community radio has helped improve people's health due its health-related programmes. During the COVID-19 pandemic these radio stations were successful in broadcasting COVID news relevant to the local, through local language (Pavarala & Malik, 2021:204). This not only made communities aware of the virus but also influenced them to act accordingly to protect themselves and their communities.

Another example of broadcasting to action is highlighted in Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2002:72) study, where it is noted that gambling became stigmatized in a community where the activity was socially acceptable. This was after the station broadcasted “a series of discussions and interviews with women and children of gamblers” about the negative impact gambling has had in their lives and/or families. As a result of these interviews gambling men from the community stopped and rejected gambling (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002:72).

Ngugi (2015) study noted that a Koch FM – a community radio station in Kenya, broadcasted issues related to crimes as reported by the community. In return, these broadcasted encouraged the community to take actions against these criminal activities (Ngugi, 2015:2). Additionally, the same station airs available vacancies (Ngugi, 2015:2). By advertising job opportunities, the station seeks to address unemployment in its community. Similarly, community radio stations advertise local businesses to promote and motivate community members to support these businesses.

The studies reviewed emphasise the importance of participation in community radio and the station's role as a developmental tool. These studies argue that not only should community members participate in the programmes of their stations, however, they must participate in decision-making processes and co-create programmes with the station. Although these studies show the significance of community radio as catalyst for social change, there is limited literature on community radio as an advocacy tool. Accordingly, this study will to an extent contribute knowledge about community radio, particularly Kurara FM and its effectiveness as a media advocate. This is important because it is argued in literature that community members should recognize community radio as their own and use it to communicate issues and information relevant to their community. Therefore, does Kurara FM use the bottom-up approach to communication or subject its listeners to passive consumers of the medium? Does the community work with the station to address their developmental issues? And to what extent does the marginalised groups in the community participate in the station's operations.

2.14. Community radio as a platform for empowerment of the marginalised

The role community radio plays in promoting social change and development have been widely examined within the broader field of development communication, particularly through

participatory and empowerment-oriented frameworks. Scholars argue that not only does this medium bridge the information gaps created by mainstream media, but it also plays significant roles in the development of communities it serves through amplifying local voices, enabling marginalised groups to articulate their concerns and engage in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Bosch, 2014; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019). Grounded in Freirean notions of dialogue and critical consciousness, participation in community radio is seen not merely as audience interaction but as an active process of co-creation and ownership that strengthens agency and collective identity. Empirical studies in diverse contexts demonstrate how community radio fosters empowerment by facilitating access to information, enhancing civic engagement, and challenging structural inequalities. This section reviews such studies to assess how these dynamics unfold in practice and to identify insights relevant to Kurara FM's role in enabling participation and inclusion within Kuruman's historically fragmented social landscape.

One of the most basic roles of community radio emphasised in literature is to facilitate empowerment by bridging the information gaps created by mainstream media (Howley, 2005:2). Thus, these broadcasting services are to air news and information about the community it serves, to be the mouthpiece of its communities; to reflect the lives of the ordinary people from these communities (Howley, 2005:2; Khan *et al.*, 2017:95; Nassanga, 2009:44; Pavarala, & Malik, 2021:191). Additionally, Khan *et al.* (2017:95) asserts that community radio reflects the "culture, ideology and thoughts, norms and values" of the communities it serves. This medium serves as a platform for community development in a sense that it airs developmental issues as identified by those who are affected by these issues (Assemah *et al.*, 2013:18; Hermansky, 2022:8; Khan *et al.*, 2017:95). As a result, community radio has created a platform where developmental issues can be addressed and has given community members a voice to communicate their issues (Assemah *et al.*, 2013:18; Hermansky, 2022:8; Khan *et al.*, 2017:95). It has allowed ordinary people to take part in conversations about what affects them. As Bhatt and Kashyap (2016:63) asserts, community radio has among other things enabled the marginalised to freely share information and their ideas to the community at large. In addition, it has created a sense of belonging for the community. Because imagine a radio station that broadcasts in your language, a radio station that speaks about the things you see on a daily, a station that speaks to you and that you can speak to; does that not create a sense of belonging?

Community radio stations are to cater for the marginalised group within the community, to encourage them to share information on their views on related matters, these mediums are to empower the marginalised community members to stand out and define their issues (Khan *et al.*, 2017:98). One way of doing this is allowing community members to use their own

language(s) because speaking one's language instills confidence in one's communication. The confidence to call in and speak, to share ideas and information on related matters. Promoting multiplicity of voices also demolishes the power imbalances that might exist within the community because in a community radio everyone has a voice. Everyone can "speak for themselves, in their own idiom and language, about what matters to them" (Backhaus, 2020:4649).

Community radio station promotes cultural heritage, thereby making use of the local spoken language and even playing traditional music during specific programmes. This is one way of preserving cultural identity since most mainstream and commercial radio stations mostly broadcasts in English. Similarly, Pandey (2024:8) argues that community radio stations play a pivotal role in "preserving and promoting local cultures and languages." Thereby broadcasting content that demonstrate the culture, traditions and languages of their communities. These stations do this through music, storytelling, cultural programs and local news in the language of the community (Pandey, 2024:8). Consequently, Pandey (2024:8) further adds that community radio stations embrace and strengthen cultural identity.

Like any other medium, community radio should inform, educate, raise awareness, entertain and act as a watchdog over the executive. Community radio should provide the community with information that will help improve the livelihoods of these communities. For instance, informing the community about a funding to start up a business, or about a municipal bursary for the next academic year. In addition, the medium can inform the community about events happening in and around the community. An example of this could be, a provincial Heritage Day event taking place in the community at a set date. Or about the auditions of a cultural calabash event taking place later in the year, the information provided about the auditions will in turn make local artists to go audition for the event. Lastly, a community radio station can for instance, inform the community about the closed road; for motorists not to use that road thus identifying an alternative route.

Community radio stations should also educate the community. An example of this could be educating the community about ways to grow their own vegetables. Or even education on how to save money. Community radio can be a powerful tool for raising awareness (Cocksedge *et al.*, 2019:1). This is because many people in rural areas depend on community radio for their news and information (Cocksedge *et al.*, 2019:1). Thus, raising awareness through this medium has the potential of making your message or information reaching a number of people. The idea is, people depend more on community radio (Cocksedge *et al.*, 2019:1) and that rural communities specifically, people there are communal, which potentially makes it

easier for those who had not gotten the message, to get it from somebody else in the community who had tuned in.

The role of the media in entertainment is to provide consumers with positive content that release tension and eases mind. As such, community media also needs to provide listeners with information, messages and/or anything that offers entertainment, anything that relaxes one's mind. To fulfil this, community radio stations may entertain listeners with music or plays (i.e radio drama). The entertainment that listeners get from community radio should also celebrate local talent and culture, for instance, playing cultural music or music from local artists and even radio plays by community members who volunteered to take part in the play. One of the many examples, can be a programme for local rappers on Saturday morning, to give even those who still in school to participate in the programme.

According to Aloyce (2013:39) community radio is a platform where community members can hold into account their local leaders. It is through this medium that the executive, the municipality, local departments and/or service providers can be held accountable thus called to account for their actions. In addition, community members can use this medium to call out those who are supposed to render them services. Furthermore, Aloyce (2013:39) asserts that it is through community radio that community members can "question their local leaders on community projects, promises, or communal decisions", this is because this cannot be easily achieved "in mainstream radio, since it deals with the entire nation". Accordingly, Pandey (2024:7) describes how Bush Radio, a community radio in Cape Town offers a platform for its community to engage with the local government officials on local issues. Consequently, the station fosters a more active community participation on the democratic process (Pandey, 2024:7). Furthermore, community radio stations can act as a watchdog over the powerful by reporting on local leaders and present the news during the station's news hour.

Community radio stations play a major role as tools for both social change and development (Bosch, 2013:432). As such, in South Africa even the ICASA policy mandates for community radio stations to "highlight grassroots community issues and promote development and improve quality of life" (Olurunnisola *et al.*, 2020:3). Accordingly, Mhagama (2016:46) asserts that community radio has been utilised as a tool for development in two ways: one, as an information dissemination tool where NGOs and the government disseminate "developmental information in areas such as health, education, agriculture, etc. to communities". Moreover, as the medium promotes local voices, it has not only been used by the government and NGOs to disseminate developmental information but also for local communities to share information and ideas/solutions on how to better their own livelihoods (Mhagama, 2016:46). As Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (cited by Mhagama, 2016:46) noted community radio as a developmental

agent entails “the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people toward a full awareness of their situation and their options for change, to resolve conflicts, to work towards consensus, to help people plan for actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their living condition and that of the society, and improve the effectiveness of institutions.”

2.15. Empowerment through information access and voice

According to Bhatt and Kashyap (2016:63) information sharing is one of the crucial aspects to bring about change and/or development. Accordingly, Turker (2013:401) asserts that both information sharing and participation are the most essential elements in development communication. Thus, for smaller communities, rural and/or remote areas, community radio is the most effective medium to share information and for people to participate in delivering content relevant to their information needs (Bhatt & Kashyap, 2016:63; Abdulai *et al.*, 2021:111). Accordingly, Backhaus (2020:4658) asserts that community radio can contribute to development through knowledge and/or information sharing. In addition, Bhatt and Kashyap (2016:64) posits that community radio “is a powerful vehicle for advocacy and social change”. Meaning that community members can use this medium to bring about desirable change.

As already mentioned, information sharing is an important element in any development activity (Mphaka, 2006). This is because people possess different knowledge, skills and/or information that could be used to improve living conditions. Accordingly, Abdulai *et al.* (2021:108) asserts that community radio is an effective medium for sharing knowledge. Consequently, the medium provides communities with a platform where they can discuss developmental issues and share knowledge on how to better their living conditions. Furthermore UNESCO (2021:21) writes that community radio has been recognised as an effective medium to “making critical public information accessible to people be it about various government provisions that they can benefit from”.

In many parts of the world, community radio has been used to share knowledge about “food production, food security and agricultural development and also influencing social change on these issues” (Abdulai *et al.*, 2021:111). This is due to the fact that many rural areas grow their own food, thus addressing such areas benefits the livelihood of the community. As such new skills and ideas of dealing with the forementioned issues may be adopted as community members continue to engage in the conversation and share their knowledge on the topic. New ideas and initiatives unveil as community members continue to engage in various topics (Abdulai *et al.*, 2021:111). As Abdulai *et al.* (2021:111) noted in a study about climate change, the engagement of community members on climate change conversations not only brings

about new initiatives, but also “creates opportunities for a fuller understanding of the range of climate realities”.

The idea behind knowledge sharing is that community members should share skills and information about what is available to the community that they can use to their advantage, to transfer expertise on different fields. Additionally, knowledge in community radio ensures that the information shared caters and fulfils the information needs of the community, whilst making a positive contribution to the livelihood of the people within the community. Knowledge sharing includes sharing information that benefits the livelihood of the community. One way of doing this, Asuman and Moodley (2023:388) found out on their study that Radio Progress, a community radio in Northern Ghana caters to the information needs of the community by broadcasting “agricultural programmes which teach and promote modern and sustainable farming methods”. Consequently, the airing of these programmes resulted in food being less costly because farms maximized due to improvements in the farming methods. Similarly, the study found that Yagbon Radio (another community radio in Ghana) airs agricultural programmes (see Asuman & Moodley, 2023), where a participant in the study confirmed that through the *Farmers Guide* programme she was “able to learn about a new rice variety that yields more and is easier to maintain and grow because it withstands the dry climate of the locality” (Asuman & Moodley, 2023:389). The programme has helped the community member to increase her productivity, from 12 bags of rice per acre to 18 bags (Asuman & Moodley, 2023:389).

A study by UNESCO (see UNESCO, 2021), as of Asuman and Moodley’s, revealed that some community radio stations in India broadcast programmes related to farming and/or agriculture. UNESCO (2021:41) noted that experts from the Department of Agriculture share information on the community radio station about new farming techniques, with emphasis on “water saving practices, blending traditional knowledge with modern techniques” among other things. Subsequently, UNESCO (2021:41) noted that community radio has been successful in enabling community members to “interact with experts” in fields they are interested in and/or fields that contributes positively to their livelihoods. In addition, the medium has created a platform for free access of information in local spoken language (UNESCO, 2021:41).

It is important to note that not only does community radio stations share information with its locale, but the radio stations also simplify complicated information for its listeners (UNESCO, 2021:42). As UNESCO (2021:42) noted, community radio stations have been successful in sharing “scientific agricultural research with farmers in a simple language in ways that are easy to understand and apply”. Similarly, Asuman and Moodley (2023:399) noted in their study that community radios in Ghana have been effective in sharing information relevant to its

locale; information directed to teach community members (with specific reference to women) “skills that can be used to build their economic capacities and improve their knowledge” as small-scale farmers. Subsequently, knowledge these women acquired from the programmes has taught them about new and improved farming methods, in addition to assisting them to transition to new farming techniques and “adopting to new farming technology”, which in turn has assisted them to grow as small-scale farmers (see Asuman & Moodley, 2023).

Asuman and Moodley (2023:397) noted that community radio stations have also been effective in broadcasting health information, where in their study they found that community radio stations have significantly aired health information which women can use to ensure that their children are healthier (see Asuman & Moodley, 2023). Moreover, health information in community radio stations ensures that the community lead a healthier lifestyle (Asuman & Moodley, 2023:397).

It is evident that community radio stations fulfil its role as a tool for community development by ensuring that community members receive information, they need to better their livelihoods. Whilst offering them the opportunity to engage and learn from experts from related fields.

Information sharing and participation are key in development, therefore a discussion on community radio as a participatory medium follows.

2.16. Empowerment through enhancing community agency and civic engagement

Community radio as a tool for development should be participatory (Dalene, 2009:10; Ochichi, 2014:80) thus the medium should facilitate dialogue, participation and empower the local community. Accordingly, the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) promotes participatory processes as one of the key aspects to achieving development through community radio (Msileni, 2021:43). Additionally, community participation enables community members to gain control and ownership of their own medium (Msileni, 2021:43). This is important, as argued that community radio is for the community by the community, thus community participation is pivotal. Furthermore, community participation is in the premise that a community radio exists due the information needs of the community (Community Radio Association, cited by Msileni, 2021:44), where in South Africa, community radio stations were established for the marginalised groups to access their own news and information (Bosch, 2018:7). As a result, the community itself should run its station because community member knows what they need.

Community members can participate in their own medium in various ways, firstly: they can be owners of the medium, involved in the decision-making processes of the medium, they can participate in the programming of the station; deciding which programmes needs to be aired,

others can participate by volunteering their time to the station; with the rest of the community members can participate by being active listeners of the station and taking part in the conversations held during specific programmes. Accordingly, Sterling *et al.*, cited by Ngugi (2015:5) noted that community radio offers its listeners a platform for debate and discussion, in addition to enabling them to participate in creating programmes tailored for their information needs.

A community radio communicates needs of the community. It is a medium for public debate and discourse; thus it should allow the community to speak for themselves. Having a community member volunteer as a broadcaster, speaking on behalf of the community, does not fulfil the role of a community radio station. It instead only means that the station is a “service” to the community, instead of being a platform for diversified voices (see Gaynor & O’Brien, 2011). Based on this, Gaynor and O’Brien (2011:8) found poor practices of community radio stations in their study, where community radio stations are “of” the community, instead of being “for” the community.

Where these stations do not offer community members a platform to engage and speak for themselves, instead the radio itself speaks for the community. This practice goes against what a community radio is and the purpose it serves as it is more related to what is being done in mainstream media. Dalene (2007:25) observed that broadcasters in mainstream media are more interested in speaking thus taking away the opportunity for the public to participate in the discussions. In theory, community radio stations give a voice to the voiceless, thus promoting a multiplicity of voices.

Accordingly, broadcasters are not to speak on behalf of the public, but to allow them to participate in the discussions held in the station. Community radio stations should, therefore, liaise with community members. These mediums should allow people to identify their own issues and find solutions to these issues. It is for this reason that I say, a broadcaster is a facilitator, a liaison officer between the community and different institutions, however, with the role to promote those active listeners and ensuring their voices are being heard. As noted by Ngugi (2015:5) with reference to Radio Ndef Leng, a community radio station in Senegal, the role of the radio broadcaster is “to act as a facilitator, to guide the discussion and prevent abuse of airtime”.

According to Dalene (2007:25) communication for development relies on an exchange of messages between all stakeholders, where both senders and receivers actively contribute to meaning making. Community radio is therefore positioned as an effective medium for social change because it amplifies the voices of those it is intended to serve. It is therefore necessary to examine how participation is operationalised in practice by exploring the mechanisms

through which communities engage in content creation and the challenges that complicate this ideal.

2.17. Mechanisms of community participation in community radio

Mechanisms of community participation in community radio are rooted in the principle of democratising media production and ensuring that local voices shape both content and governance. Participation extends beyond mere audience interaction to include involvement in programme design, decision-making processes, and station management (Bosch, 2013; Howley, 2010). These mechanisms can take various forms, such as call-in segments, listener forums, programme summits, open editorial meetings, and the inclusion of community representatives on station boards (Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2022). Freirean participatory communication models frame these mechanisms as dialogical spaces where communities co-create knowledge and challenge dominant narratives. However, their effectiveness depends on equitable access, skills training, and the station's ability to navigate internal power dynamics and external constraints. Understanding these mechanisms is thus essential for assessing how community radio operationalises participation in ways that either empower or inadvertently exclude marginalised groups.

As per its definition, community radio is a “social process or event” in which the community can collaborate and design programmes that are best suited for them (Bamigboye and Osunkunle, 2021:4). Some of the papers reviewed reveal that most community radio stations go about community involvement in the programmes of the station the wrong way by being more reliant on involving the community on the programmes that are already decided on and are currently running. This means that community radio stations do not fully give its community members power, the power to decide content they would like to air. Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:6) points out the importance of allowing community involvement in content development of the station, they argue that listeners' participation in content creation enables the station to broadcast programmes relevant to the community “needs and aspirations”. Consequently, promoting public participation in content creation is one of the greatest ways to ensure that content produced is relevant to the community. Accordingly, Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:1) assert that community radio should encourage community participation to maintain the bottom-up approach nature of community radio stations. Similarly, Olorunnisola *et al.* (2020:15) opined that the programming of these stations should “go beyond public affairs and music” to actively engage and involve the community. In order to clarify how these dynamics operate in practice, Table 2.1 below summarises key structural mechanisms that shape community participation in community radio.

Table 2:1 Structural mechanisms shaping participation and voice in community radio

Mechanism	Tools/Methods	Benefit/description
Content creation and programming	Call-ins, sms feedback, social media interaction Email	Enable real-time listener contributions to discussions (Bosch, 2013). An online platform where listeners can share content ideas (Olorunnisola <i>et al.</i> , 2020).
Programming summit and community forums	Physical and online, i.e., social media	Platforms where audiences co-determine programming priorities (Olorunnisola <i>et al.</i> , 2020). This approach will allow members who cannot attend physical summits to also put in their suggestions and/or ideas.
Citizen journalism	Social media	Community members gather and share local news, reflecting grassroots realities (Howley, 2010). Community radio stations can use social media platforms to gather information from the public, which can then be incorporated into the station's programming. Through this method the station ensures that its content remains reflective of the community's interest. However, it is important that proper research is conducted before broadcasting the content sourced from these social media platforms.
Local language programming		Ensures inclusion of indigenous voices and cultural relevance (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002).
Research	Qualitative or quantitative	Research on the "needs, views, and desires of listeners," and consider them when developing the station's programs (Osunkunle, 2013). Conduct research to identify appropriate language suitable for listeners of specific programs (Osunkunle, 2013). This is because different programs target different audiences; therefore, it is essential to know which language a specific target group prefers for their program.
Station governance and decision-making	Community elected boards	Promote accountability and local control over station policies (Tucker, 2013). Likewise, some participants in Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:7) study, suggested forming a committee of community representatives at the station to contribute to the programming on behalf of the community

	Opening policy meetings	Forums for public input on station management and strategic direction (Olorunnisola <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
	Volunteer committees	Encourage rotational participation in organisational functions (Bosch, 2013).
Production and technical roles	Training and skills development	Equips community members to produce and present programmes (Tucker, 2013).
	Volunteer presenters and producers	Facilitate grassroots ownership of content and on-air presence (Howley, 2010).
	Technical engagement	Involvement in equipment maintenance and broadcasting operations (Tucker, 2013).
Outreach and mobilisation	Listener clubs or associations	Collective groups engaging with the station to advocate for community needs (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Osunkunle, 2013).
	Field reporting and outside broadcasting	Bringing the station into community spaces, reinforcing proximity and visibility (Bosch, 2013). Accordingly, Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:4) suggest that producers can engage in community activities and events, record these activities, and broadcast them on the radio station. Not only does this strategy enriches the station's content but it also fosters stronger connections between the station and its community.
	Workshops and development programmes	Using radio as a hub for capacity-building and civic education (Howley, 2010).
Feedback and accountability Mechanisms	Digital platforms and social media	Strengthening interactivity and transparency between broadcasters and audiences (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019).
	Listener surveys and needs assessments	Systematic evaluation of station responsiveness (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). In a similar view, Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:7) found in their study that Forte FM, a community radio station in the Eastern Cape uses one of their programs to assess whether listeners are satisfied with their program. According to one of their participants, Forte FM uses its public sphere program to get inputs from its listeners "on how their programs could be more impactful" (Bamigboye & Osunkunle, 2021:7).
	Community audits	Public forums reviewing station performance and ensuring accountability (Tucker, 2013).

While the foregoing discussion underscores the centrality of participation in community radio, this process is far from straightforward. Participation often unfolds within unequal social contexts where existing marginalisation and power imbalances persist, and it may also be shaped by external pressures such as corporate influence and donor expectations.

2.18. Conclusion

This chapter emphasises the importance of participation in community radio as well as the radio station's role as a developmental tool. It argues that community radio plays a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue among community members, fostering collaboration, mutual understanding, and collective decision-making, which is essential for building social cohesion and supporting sustainable development. Consequently, this study also focuses on a community radio station as a catalyst for social change, particularly Kurara FM and its effectiveness as a media advocate to empower community members to take charge of their own lives. Accordingly, the study is guided by Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication frameworks which are discussed in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of how Kurara FM, as a community radio station facilitates social change and local development initiatives in Kuruman. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, community radio in South Africa is both a participatory medium rooted in local ownership and a broadcast institution embedded in national regulatory, political and funding structures. Theoretically, this dual character calls for a framework that can account for community-based participation as well as the broader power dynamics shaping media agendas and development discourse.

As introduced in Chapter 1, the study is primarily anchored in two complementary theoretical perspectives namely Participatory Communication for Development and Media Advocacy Theory. However, elements of development media theory and agenda-setting theory are employed selectively as secondary lenses that situate Kurara FM within wider media–state–society relations. Participatory communication provides a normative and analytical lens for understanding how communities ought to define problems, deliberate on solutions and act collectively through dialogical, bottom-up processes. Media advocacy, in turn, conceptualises media, especially community-based media, as strategic tools for raising public awareness, reframing issues as structural problems and pressing for policy or institutional change.

To deepen this framing, the chapter also draws on the meta-theoretical critique of participatory communication by Dervin and Huesca, as applied and extended in Lubombo's (2012) work on participatory communication in South Africa. In addition, Development Media Theory and Agenda-setting Theory are employed as secondary lenses to situate Kurara FM within broader debates about media's role in development and to understand how particular issues become salient in the Kuruman public sphere.

This chapter proceeds by first providing an overview of the theoretical framing of the study. It then elaborates participatory communication as the primary paradigm. Thereafter, it discusses Media Advocacy Theory, situates community radio within development media theory, and introduces agenda-setting as a supporting concept. Finally, it synthesises this Framework in Figure 3.1 and describes the implications of this framework for the subsequent empirical analysis of Kurara FM.

3.2. Overview of the theoretical framing of the study

The preceding chapter showed that community radio in South Africa is often celebrated as being for the community, by the community, yet in practice its operation is mediated by funding dependencies, licensing arrangements, regulatory frameworks and wider political–economic pressures (Bosch 2010; Teer-Tomaselli 2001). Community stations are expected simultaneously to function as local public spheres, development partners, cultural platforms and, increasingly, multi-platform media organisations that must survive in competitive and resource-scarce environments (Bosch 2014; Mtimde 2024). In the case of Kurara FM, this complexity is compounded by geographical dispersal, infrastructural deficits and a history of marginalisation affecting communities such as the †Khomani (Grant 2012; Mokoena *et al.* 2019). The study therefore approaches Kurara FM in three interrelated ways shown in Figure 3.1 at the end of this chapter. First, as a participatory communication platform through which local residents may voice needs, debate problems and co-construct solutions; second, as an advocacy-oriented medium through which issues such as service delivery, unemployment, land use or cultural recognition are reframed as public problems and placed on institutional agendas; and lastly, as a broadcast institution shaped by national development discourses, community-media policy and agenda-setting processes in the South African media system (Bosch 2014; Olorunnisola & Tomaselli 2011).

Within this triangulation, participatory communication for development provides the primary normative and analytical anchor. Drawing on Freire’s notion of dialogical pedagogy and conscientisation, participatory approaches insist that people should be treated as subjects of their own development rather than as objects of externally designed interventions (Freire 1970). The work by Servaes (2008), Melkote and Steeves (2001) and Mefalopulos (2008) consolidates this paradigm by emphasising that communication for development should be people-centred, culturally grounded and oriented towards social justice and empowerment rather than towards persuasive campaigns aimed at individual behaviour change. In this view, development is understood as a process defined and driven by communities themselves, with communication functioning as a space for negotiation, critical reflection and joint decision-making (Melkote & Steeves 2001; Servaes 2008). Applied to Kurara FM, this perspective directs attention to whether the station’s formats, languages, participatory opportunities and governance arrangements enable residents of Kuruman, including historically marginalised groups to participate meaningfully in identifying development challenges, deliberating on responses and shaping local priorities, rather than being positioned only as audiences for pre-packaged content.

Media Advocacy Theory (Wallack, 1994; Wallack *et al.*, 1993) complements this participatory lens by providing strategic concepts for understanding how community media can be used to confront structural power imbalances. Wallack (1994) and Wallack *et al.* (1993) define media advocacy as the strategic use of mass media to advance public policy initiatives by shifting attention from individual behaviour to the social, economic and political conditions that shape people's lives. Rather than focusing on an information gap, media advocacy addresses a power gap by seeking to reframe issues as matters of social justice, foreground structural determinants such as housing, regulation or access to services, and apply pressure on decision-makers through news, talk shows and other formats (Wallack 1994; Wallack *et al.* 1993). Waisbord (2014) and Fayoyin (2014) extend this argument to development and social change, presenting media advocacy as located at the intersection of communication, citizen mobilisation and institutional reform. In the context of Kurara FM, Media Advocacy Theory is used analytically to examine how the station and its publics might work together to place issues such as poor infrastructure, lack of services, youth unemployment or cultural erasure on the public agenda; how these issues are framed (for example as isolated complaints, governance failures or rights violations); and how radio-based visibility and debate feed into attempts to secure institutional responses. Media advocacy therefore links Kurara FM's everyday programming to broader struggles over policy, accountability and rights in Kuruman.

Elements of development media theory and agenda-setting theory are employed selectively as secondary lenses that situate Kurara FM within wider media–state–society relations. Development media theory, most closely associated with McQuail (2010), conceptualises media in developing societies as having a responsibility to support national development goals, work in partnership with the state, and promote social integration, even if this sometimes implies closer alignment with governmental priorities and certain limits on media autonomy. In this perspective, mass media are expected to disseminate information that contributes to economic growth, political stability and nation-building (McQuail 2010). This resonates with South African policy expectations that community radio should contribute to local development and democracy, but it also raises critical questions about the balance between community ownership and state influence, especially in settings where stations depend on government advertising, grants or parastatal funding (Bosch 2014; MDDA 2023).

Agenda-setting theory, initially developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), holds that the media do not tell people what to think, but are highly effective in telling their audiences what to think about by repeatedly and prominently highlighting particular issues. First-level agenda-setting research focuses on issue salience, the relative prominence and frequency of issues in media coverage and their perceived importance among audiences (McCombs & Shaw 1972;

McCombs 2004). Second-level agenda-setting extends this to attribute salience, examining how the characteristics and causal interpretations associated with an issue shape how people think about it (McCombs 2004). For a station such as Kurara FM, which is one of the few consistent media sources in a geographically dispersed and largely rural district, editorial decisions about which problems to feature and how to frame them are likely to have a significant impact on what community members perceive as the most urgent development priorities and on the evaluative criteria they use to judge local authorities.

3.3. The participatory communication as a theoretical framework for community radio and social change

Participatory communication for development framework, explains how development should be based on the needs, interests, and capacities of the people themselves. This framework, whose proponents include Paolo Mefalopulos; Paulo Freire, Jan Servaes, and few other scholars, believes in giving people the power to decide on how they will go about reducing the pressures they are faced with. It aims to allow ordinary people to participate as equal partners in their own development (Servaes, 2008:169). It awards them the power to be the ones to spearhead their development and/or development activities. It is in the premise that development should start from within. According to Ochichi (2014:83) “participatory communication makes it possible for the disadvantaged people to voice their needs, plan what they can do (supported or not), decide how to go about it, choose to do it and envisage the outcome.” Accordingly, the participatory approach gives local people power to decide what they want as they know what is best for them (Servaes, 2008:168). Subsequently, this paradigm adopts the bottom-up approach communication model as people from grassroots decide what is best for them.

Participatory approach emerged to address the failures of many developmental projects. Developmental experts realised that many developmental projects fail because communities whom these projects are for were not participating (Dalene, 2007:22). As a result, beneficiaries of these projects had to participate, thus the concept of participation.

Furthermore, participatory approach emphasizes local people’s participation, recognizes and respect cultural identity (Servaes, 2008:169). Accordingly, the paradigm realises that local people carry local knowledge and traditions necessary for their development, therefore local culture and traditions should be incorporated to bring about desired changed.

The premise of participatory communication is the idea that ordinary people should participate as equal members in every way. It demolishes the power structures that might be in place and believe that people are equal, thus everyone should actively participate and be given a chance to voice their concerns (Servaes, 2008:168). Consequently, paradigm promotes dialogue –

where people can share ideas as equal partners in efforts to bring about change. Accordingly, the communicative action concept was developed by Jurgen Habermas in 1970s and became popular in the communication field in the 1980s (Otto & Fourie, 2016:30).

Communicative action theory is concerned with how people interact during the communication process (Jacobson, 2003:103). Accordingly, Jacobson (2003:103) argues that the theory is more concerned with action rather than the communication itself. It focuses on whether people communicate to reach mutual understanding and/or consensus within their dialogues without any manipulation (Jacobson, 2003:102). In addition, Jacobson (2003:103) posits that the focus of communicative action is not the exchange of information, but what it attempts to do. Whether participants engage in dialogue to reach mutual understanding or simply to manipulate each other. As a result, Habermas, cited by Otto and Fourie (2016:33) as well as Jacobson (2003:103) argues that mutual understanding can only be reached if participants in the communication process engage with each other as equal partners. Therefore, for people to communicate as equal partners, the following regulations should be followed: “all participants have equal opportunity to express any assertion they wish. Participants have equal opportunity to challenge any statement they want. All participants can participate fully in discussions without restriction concerning either the topics or the participants” (Otto & Fourie, 2016:34).

3.4. Meta-theoretic assumptions

The participatory paradigm’s meta-theoretical framework, as outlined by Dervin and Huesca (1999) and applied by Lubombo (2012), is rooted in six foundational ontological and epistemological assumptions: authority, naturalism, cultural relativity, postmodernism, and communitarianism. These assumptions offer a comprehensive lens for understanding how community radio fosters community development.

Authority posits that reality is fixed and defined by institutional powers, suggesting that community radio stations might operate under institutional mandates, thereby reinforcing top-down development initiatives (Lubombo, 2012). This perspective aligns with the Agenda-Setting Theory, where media outlets, including community radio, shape the public agenda by determining which issues are highlighted, often in line with authoritative sources. Naturalism acknowledges diversity within a fixed reality while privileging expertise (Lubombo, 2012). For community radio, this means leveraging expert knowledge, such as agricultural extension services, to guide development efforts and foster informed decision-making. This aligns with the Media Advocacy Theory, where media platforms are used to amplify expert voices and promote specific development goals, ensuring that accurate and specialised information reaches the community.

Cultural relativity emphasises the importance of cultural diversity and context-bound realities, suggesting that community radio must tailor its content to reflect and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the communities it serves (Lubombo, 2012). This approach enhances the relevance and acceptance of development messages, which is crucial for effective media advocacy, as it ensures that the advocacy efforts resonate with the cultural values and norms of the target audience. Constructivism, which focuses on individuals constructing their own realities based on personal experiences (Lubombo, 2012), highlights the role of community radio in providing a platform for community members to share their stories and perspectives. This participatory approach contributes to the collective construction of community identity and development narratives, empowering individuals to engage actively in shaping their community's future.

Postmodernism, with its embrace of multiple realities and rejection of a single, unified narrative (Lubombo, 2012), is relevant for analysing how community radio navigates the fragmented and pluralistic nature of communities. By offering diverse programming that reflects various voices, community radio fosters a space where different viewpoints coexist, promoting a more inclusive and dynamic discourse on community development. This aligns with the Agenda-Setting Theory, where the media's role in highlighting diverse issues allows for a broader, more inclusive public dialogue. Finally, Communitarianism seeks to harmonise order and chaos through dialogue and collective action (Lubombo, 2012). Community radio plays a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue among community members, fostering collaboration, mutual understanding, and collective decision-making, which is essential for building social cohesion and supporting sustainable development.

Together, these meta-theoretical assumptions underpin the investigation of community radio's role in facilitating community engagement, information dissemination, and empowerment, the key concepts viewed in the study through the theoretical lenses of media advocacy and agenda-setting theories.

3.5. Theoretical assumptions

The analytical tools provided by media advocacy as understood within a participatory development paradigm are important in providing an understanding of the interplay between community media and community development. Media advocacy refers to an action by which community members take advantage of the media to raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes that address issues they are faced with, with an aim to achieving social change (Wallack, 1994:421). The theory allows us to understand how a community uses the media to articulate their voices regarding the change they desire (Wallack, 1994:421). Traditionally, media advocacy involved strategic use of mass media to pressurise policymakers into

advancing healthy public policies (Wallack, 1994:424; Dorfman & Krasnow, 2018:294; Waisbord, 2018:294). Currently, it is also found in broader development communication and journalism, with the main goal of ensuring that “social issues become objects of media discourse and public agenda” (Fayoyin, 2014:50). Media advocacy is widely acknowledged as a strategy for shaping public debate by involving the media to amplify specific social issues.

The origins of media advocacy and the person who coined the phrase remain uncertain. However, the notion became popular in the health sector in the 1980s (Wallack *et al.*, 1993:3). It was used as a method to advocate laws relating to tobacco and alcohol regulation. Health activists strategically utilized the media to compel lawmakers to support healthy public policies (Wallack *et al.*, 1993:3). Media advocacy offered a voice for public health, allowing professionals to express concerns about health issues while ensuring that narratives supported public health values and aims (Wallack *et al.*, 1993:3). As such, these stories were presented from a public health’s perspective (Wallack *et al.*, 1993:3).

Many scholars recognise Lawrence Wallack as a key contributor to the development of Media Advocacy Theory. Unlike traditional media, media advocacy is centred on addressing societal issues as opposed to personal concerns (Waisbord, 2020:116). For the media to effectively advocate for a cause, it must be a matter of common interest and/or social condition (Wallack, 1994:423; Gibson, 2010:47; Waisbord, 2020:117). Thus, this theory addresses problems that affect the community at large, shifting focus from individual issues to broader societal challenges (Wallack, 1994:423; Gibson, 2010:47; Pandit, 2014:172; Waisbord, 2020:117). Wallack (1994:423) explains that while traditional mass media focuses on the information gap, which suggests that health problems are caused by a lack of knowledge among affected individuals, media advocacy is more concerned with the power gap, which sees health problems as a result of power imbalances that prevent communities from addressing their health problems and effect change. Similarly, Waisbord (2020:116) argues that media advocates treat health conditions as social justice rather than personal issues. Therefore, media advocates direct their efforts towards policymakers, executives, and those in positions of power who can alter the social conditions of affected communities.

Echoing the same views, Pandit (2014:172) argues that media advocacy aims to set the agenda for improving “the human condition by reframing issues of principle where the lives of innocent people are at stake”. This approach shifts the focus from individual concerns to collective challenges (Pandit, 2014:172; Waisbord, 2020:117). Wallack (1994:423) also emphasizes that the core strategy of media advocacy is to collaborate with the community to leverage the power of the media to improve their social context. Likewise, Waisbord

(2020:117) posits that “media advocacy adopts a participatory approach that emphasizes the need of the communities to gain control and power to transform their environments”.

Media advocacy is about utilizing the influence of media to address social issues in order to achieve desired social change (Wallack, 1994:421; Jacobson, 2003:96). It is an act of leveraging media to convey issues that hinder progress. A partnership between the community and the media to ensure accountability among those in power and advocate for social change (Wallack, 1994:421; Jacobson, 2003:96). In addition, media advocacy can be described as a social change strategy that employs the media to advocate for action, shape public debate and/or to put a spotlight on issues of concerns with an aim of achieving desirable outcomes (Waisbord, 2020:117). A community’s effort to improve their social standards through the media. The theory believes in the ability of the media to disseminate information that can result in positive changes (Waisbord, 2020:116).

Media advocacy focuses on issues that hinders progress, development or change. It is the innovative and strategic use of the media by community members to address issues that hinders their progress and/or development, as well as a strategy to hold the executive accountable for their actions and/or governance (Wallack, 1994:421; Waisbord, 2020:117). Furthermore, it can be defined as a strategy for community members to bring about societal change (Wallack, 1994:421; Jacobson, 2003:96). The media’s efforts to help the community address conditions that puts the community’s life at risk (Pandit, 2014:172).

According to Pandit (2014:172) the definition of media advocacy and who media advocates are is dependent on the following questions: “what is at stake, which problem-areas are we interested in and which paradigms we want to change”. Media advocacy is traditionally located within the development media theory.

3.6. Development media theory

The basic idea of media development is that that the media should work with the government, in this case, the community to achieve set rural developmental goals (Musa, 1997:133; Inyang, *et al.*, 2020:72). Located within development journalism, “a notion of journalism according to which reporting events of national and international significance should be constructive in the sense that it contributes positively to the development of the country concerned” (Musa, 1997:133). Accordingly, Basse (2019:25) argues that mass media is expected to focus on information that contributes positively to the “economic and social progress of the society”. Therefore, more broadcasts on information that promotes government’s development goals. Accordingly, Ebeze, cited by Inyang *et al.* (2020:72) adds that “economic development and nation-building” should be at the forefront of the media agenda. Furthermore, it is argued that apart from its watchdog function, the media should be used to promote the economic and

political growth of the country, as well as to celebrate the cultural identities of those who live in it (Inyang *et al.*, 2020:72).

In essence, the core idea of development media theory is that mass media should help the government reach its developmental goals, that mass media should be at the forefront of development thereby broadcasting positive information that adds to the development of the nation. In addition, Inyang *et al.* (2020:72) posits that not only should mass media be “instruments of development but it should also drive and determine development”.

Many scholars acknowledge Dennis McQuil as the key contributor of development media theory. As a result, McQuil proposed five basic assumptions of development media theory as (Musa,1997:136). One of these assumptions is that the media should partner with the government to support national development programs. In this context, the media should collaborate with local government to support its development initiatives. This can be achieved through the dissemination of municipal development plans, while simultaneously encouraging accountability in service delivery. Additionally, the station should facilitate dialogue between the community and its members to ensure that the public participates in matters that affect them.

The second assumption relates to the prioritisation of local language and culture. The media should make use of the locally spoken language to ensure that community members can receive and share information in a language they are comfortable with and can freely express themselves in. This also ensures the inclusion of marginalised groups.

The theory also includes restrictions on the media. Specifically, it suggests that the media should surrender its freedom of speech in the interest of public welfare and development efforts. In this regard, media messages should be constructed to serve the greater good.

Furthermore, one of the assumptions proposes that the media should give priority to collective matters rather than individual concerns. Community radio should therefore focus on public issues—such as roads and infrastructure, sanitation, and crime. This aligns with the principles of Media Advocacy Theory, which argues that media should address problems affecting the community at large, shifting the focus from individual issues to broader societal challenges.

The final assumption suggests that the state can restrict, censor, control, or even operate the media as it deems fit in the interest of the nation. However, this poses a threat to media freedom and its watchdog role over authority. At the same time, it can ensure that the station’s broadcasts align with government plans, which may help eliminate misinformation. Nevertheless, this tenet is not applicable to community radio stations, as their model is based on community ownership—particularly by marginalised groups. Therefore, allowing local

government to impose restrictions or assume ownership of community radio does not align with the principles and purpose of such stations.

3.7. Agenda-setting

As discussed, media advocacy is widely recognized as a strategy for shaping public discourse by involving the media to reinforce specific social issues. Accordingly, Fayoyin (2014:51) posits that media advocacy is expected to guide the media on what to cover. This approach to media advocacy is acknowledged as agenda-setting.

Agenda-Setting Theory is associated with the salience of issues presented in the media. It refers to an action by which the mass media presents “certain news issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others” (Coleman *et al.*, 2009:147). It is the media’s efforts to focus on specific news stories, with the aim that people would perceive these news stories as pressing matters that are more important than others. In other words, it is all about the media’s efforts to tell people what to think about (Cohen, 1963:13; Triqueros and Mas, 2018:54). Through agenda-setting, community radio can help raise awareness on social issues with the intention of achieving social change. It could make more people aware of their developmental issues that thus influencing public discourse and attention to those issues. Which can in turn mobilise the community to take collective action around the said issues.

Wu and Coleman (2009:776) defines agenda-setting as a mass media theory associated with the selections of “issues and portraying them frequently and prominently, which leads people to perceive those issues as more important than others.” In simple terms, the theory suggests that as the media frequently disseminate certain news item, the more important these items become to the public (Coleman *et al.*, 2009:147). Therefore, the theory assumes that the media has an influence in shaping public discourse. Apart from being a guideline for media advocates, Coleman *et al.* (2009:149) posits that agenda-setting plays an important role in ‘focusing people’s attention on issues that government and public institutions can resolve’. Consequently, agenda-setting influences change, thereby pressuring local governments and relevant stakeholders to respond or resolve the matters at hand. The following are tenets of agenda-setting theory.

Media salience transfer refers to the process by which the media influences public perception not by dictating what individuals should think, but by shaping what they think about. This is achieved by increasing the visibility and perceived importance of certain issues through repeated and prominent coverage. In the context of community radio, such as Kurara FM, this process can be strategically employed to highlight issues of common concern within the community. By frequently featuring these issues in its programming, the station contributes to

the perception that these matters are of greater importance than others. This phenomenon is known as issue salience transfer, which posits that the more coverage an issue receives, the more significant it becomes in the public's mind.

The placement and prominence of an issue within the station's content further influence its salience. For instance, whether an issue is covered in the news bulletin, presented as a headline, or featured in a specific programme affects how the audience perceives its relevance. The editorial decisions regarding where and how an issue is broadcast play a critical role in shaping public attention and concern.

The second level of agenda-setting theory extends this concept to attribute salience, which concerns the manner in which an issue is covered. This includes the tone, depth, and framing of the coverage. Just as issue salience determines what the public thinks about, attribute salience influences how the public thinks about it. Moreover, the impact of salience transfer is amplified when the issue is perceived as personally relevant to the audience. This is referred to as need orientation, where the salience of an issue increases if the community feels it directly addresses their needs or challenges.

By making certain issues more salient, the media also shapes the criteria by which the public evaluates leaders, institutions, and policies. In the case of Kurara FM, the station may choose to focus on service delivery concerns based on its understanding of community sentiment toward the local municipality. This targeted coverage can influence how residents assess the performance of their leaders and public institutions.

It is also important to note that the media agenda is not shaped solely by journalists. External sources such as political actors, interest groups, and broader societal forces play a significant role in determining what issues receive coverage. Community radio stations, while rooted in grassroots engagement, are nonetheless influenced by these external pressures and interests. This dynamic underscores the complex interplay between media producers and societal stakeholders in shaping public discourse.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the multi-layered conceptual framework described in the foregoing. Kurara FM is positioned as an institutional site embedded within structural media - state - development relations. Through participatory communication, media advocacy and agenda-setting processes, the station shapes issue salience, mobilisation and institutional accountability, thereby influencing local development outcomes. These processes are underpinned by meta-theoretical assumptions regarding authority, knowledge, culture and community.

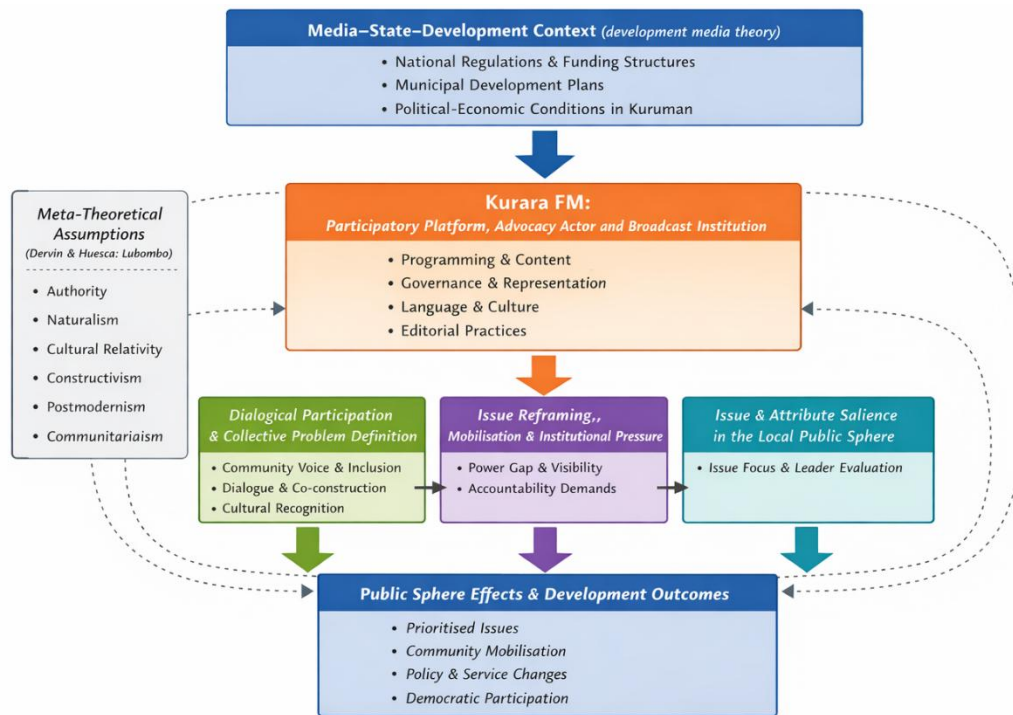


Figure 3.1: Own illustration of a conceptual framework for analysing Kurara FM's role on social change

As shown in Figure 3.1, the model is structured across four levels. At the top level, the structural context captures national regulatory frameworks, funding arrangements, municipal development agendas and local political economic conditions. Drawing on development media theory as articulated by Denis McQuail (2010), this layer acknowledges that even if community radio retain normative commitment to community ownership and democratic participation, they operate within institutional constraints that shape, but do not fully determine, editorial autonomy.

At the centre of the framework is Kurara FM as a participatory platform, advocacy actor and broadcast institution grounded in Paulo Freire's (1970) dialogical pedagogy. Its programming formats, governance arrangements, linguistic choices and editorial practices mediate between structural pressures and community engagement. The third level specifies the communicative mechanisms through which the station potentially influences development outcomes. Participatory communication foregrounds dialogue, inclusion and collective problem definition, consistent with Freirean and Servaes' traditions. Media advocacy highlights the strategic reframing of issues as structural concerns, shifting attention from information gaps to power gaps in the sense articulated by Wallack. Agenda-setting theory, following McCombs and

Shaw, explains how issue and attribute salience shape public priorities and evaluative criteria regarding local authorities.

At the bottom level, these processes converge in public sphere effects and development outcomes, including issue prioritisation, mobilisation, accountability and policy response. A cross-cutting meta-theoretical layer, drawing on Dervin and Huesca underscores the ontological and epistemological assumptions that inform conceptions of authority, culture, knowledge and community throughout the model.

Together, these frameworks shape the analytical questions that guide the empirical chapters that follow. The analysis examines how Kurara FM embodies participatory communication principles in its programming, governance and relationships with different segments of the Kuruman community. It explores how the station, together with community actors, uses media advocacy strategies to frame issues, mobilise publics and press for policy or institutional change. It scrutinises how development agendas are negotiated between community-driven priorities, state expectations and funder frameworks. It also investigates which issues become most salient on Kurara FM's agenda and what this reveals about power relations and the distribution of voice in Kuruman.

The next chapter draws on this theoretical framework to justify the research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments and analysis procedures used to investigate Kurara FM's role in local development initiatives and social change.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. The study adopted a qualitative research approach executed through a case study design. The chapter outlines specific methodological procedures followed to investigate the ways in which Kurara Fm facilitates local development initiatives in Kuruman, a town in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa.

4.2. Research approach

As already mentioned, the study adopts a qualitative research approach, to understand people's experiences with their community radio station. According to Islam and Aldaihani (2022:2) a qualitative research approach is useful when investigating and trying to understand a phenomenon, context and experiences of the research participants. As such, this study investigates the ways in which Kurara FM facilitates local development initiatives in Kuruman, through community members and the station's workers. This method greatly assisted in gaining deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding. (Lim, 2024:1; Spencer *et al.*, 2003:17) of the community radio station and its operations as well as experiences and perspectives of community members.

The decision to using qualitative research was beyond a methodological choice but rather was a commitment to engage with research participants on a deeper level to deeply understand their experiences and perspective about the subject at hand (Lim, 2024:1). For this reason, the study dealt with small data sets, rather than large ones. The small data set ensured that a substantial amount of time was spent with research participants as the goal was to understand their perspectives on Kurara FM's functions. Moreover, small data set was used because qualitative research is more concerned with the quality of data, rather than the quantity of it (Spencer *et al.*, 2003:32).

One of the reasons for deciding on a qualitative research was because this study investigates the what and how of a social phenomenon (Lim, 2024:2; Ormston *et al.*, 2014:3, Spencer *et al.*, 2003:17), that is, "How Kurara Fm facilitates local development initiatives in Kuruman" and in what ways does the community radio station foster local development. Furthermore, it is evident that the study deals with words rather than numbers, hence the application of a qualitative research approach (Ormston *et al.*, 2014:3). Finally, this research approach was

deemed more applicable to this study whose broad aim is to explore how community radio operates to help contribute to the development of the community.

The key characteristics of qualitative research applicable to this study, as outlined by Spencer *et al.* (2003:32) and Snape and Spencer (cited by Lubombo, 2015:175), include a concern with meanings, particularly the subjective meanings held by participants, and a commitment to viewing and, when necessary, explaining phenomena from the perspective of those being studied. Qualitative research is grounded in naturalistic inquiry, taking place in real-world rather than experimental or manipulated settings, and it relies on non-standardised, semi-structured or unstructured methods that remain sensitive to the social context of the study. It seeks to provide a deep and interpretive understanding of individuals' social worlds by exploring their social and material circumstances, experiences, perspectives and histories. This approach typically involves a relatively small number of purposefully selected participants, with data collection methods that allow close interaction between the researcher and participants to facilitate the exploration of emergent issues. The aim is to generate detailed, rich and extensive information, with analysis allowing concepts and ideas to emerge, leading to detailed description, classification, pattern identification and the development of typologies and explanations. Ultimately, qualitative findings focus on interpreting social meaning by mapping and representing the social world of the research participants.

The above characteristics informed the epistemological position and the qualitative approach adopted for this study which, as already indicated, seeks perspectives of the station's personnel and community leaders regarding the ways in which Kurara FM is fostering local community development.

4.3. Research design: Kurara FM case study

This research employs an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995) of Kurara FM. It positions Kurara FM as a strategic site for investigating broader theoretical and practical questions about community radio's role in fostering social change within fragmented contexts. Unlike intrinsic case studies which focus on understanding a unique case for its own sake, an instrumental approach uses the case as a vehicle to illuminate a larger phenomenon or refine existing theory (Stake, 1995). Here, Kurara FM serves as a purposeful example to explore how grassroots media operationalises participatory communication strategies and navigates historical socio-cultural divisions in marginalised communities like Kuruman.

Kurara FM is a community radio station based in Kuruman in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District of the Northern Cape province of South Africa, a predominantly rural region characterised by dispersed settlements, high poverty levels and limited access to mainstream media and state services (Grant 2012; Mokoena *et al.* 2019). Established in 2012, the station broadcasts mainly in Setswana, Afrikaans and English, language choices that align with the linguistic profile of the district. The station foregrounds cultural and linguistic inclusion as a core part of its mandate (Kurara FM 2024). On its public platforms, Kurara FM presents itself as a significant player in facilitating social change and empowering communities in and around Kuruman. Its stated objectives include educating marginalised communities about broadcasting, improving the welfare of rural areas through exposure to local and national events, and bridging societal gaps through diverse programming that connects listeners to information, opportunities and public debate (Kurara FM 2025). Programming reportedly ranges from current affairs and service-delivery discussions to agricultural advice, youth shows and religious content, combining hard development information with formats that encourage listener participation through call-ins, messages and community announcements (Bosch 2014; Kurara FM 2024).

Within this study, Kurara FM is treated as an instrumental case rather than an intrinsic one. This is not least because the primary interest of the study lies not only in the station for its own sake, but in what its practices reveal about the broader possibilities and constraints of community radio as a vehicle for participatory communication, advocacy and social change in fragmented rural contexts. Stake (1995) argues that instrumental case studies enable a thick, contextually embedded analysis that retains the holistic complexity of the case, rather than reducing it to a set of variables. This logic is particularly apposite here, as Kurara FM operates at the intersection of community expectations, regulatory frameworks, donor and state funding, local politics and historical marginalisation. By tracing how Kurara FM articulates its mandate, structures participation, frames development issues and negotiates power relations with actors such as municipal authorities and funders, the case study illuminates the lived dynamics of participatory and advocacy-oriented communication within Kuruman's specific socio-historical landscape (Yin 2018; Stake 1995). Although the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable, the instrumental case study design allows for analytical generalisation. This means that insights from Kurara FM may be used to inform theorisation about community media in other rural or marginalised settings where stations similarly operate amid spatial fragmentation, social inequality and contested development agendas (Stake 1995; Yin 2018).

4.3.1. Population and sampling

The term population in research refers to the targeted group from which the study will draw its sample. Kamper (cited by Muzari *et al.*, 2022:16) defines a sample as a “subset of a population and it categorises the population according to a specific status.” The targeted group for this study comprises two categories, namely the station’s personnel as well as selected leaders representing the community.

4.3.2. Population

The radio personnel of Kurara FM are a key constituency that can provide useful information required for the study. This included the station manager, producers, news reporters, and presenters. The reason why this category of the population was required for this study is because the study investigates the ways community radio fosters local community development. This means that the radio station’s personnel are the most relevant population without whose input the study could have been difficult to accomplish. Because of the relevance of radio personnel in a study like this, few similar studies reviewed used the same populations (see Al-hassan *et al.*, 2011; Dalene, 2007; Fombad & Jiyane, 2019; Mohapanele, 2017; Ochichi, 2014)

The other segment of the population is community leaders. This is because community leaders know of everything that happens in their community, and they represent their respective communities. Previous studies on community development involved community leaders. Accordingly, this study aimed to benefit from the similar population (Mokoena *et al.*, 2019).

4.3.3. Sampling

Sampling refers to the process of selecting participants whom data will be drawn from. It is a group of people from the targeted population whose data will be collected and generalized to the entire population. Non-probability sampling was used for this study. Non-probability sampling techniques are methods where researchers choose their samples for specific reasons, meaning that these methods are not random (Maree, 2016:197). The criteria for these samples are the station workers and community members who actually listen to Kurara FM. These people are to provide valuable insights of the stations and their experiences or perspectives about it.

The sampling technique that was used for this study is purposive sampling. This is because the study specifically targeted people who will be able to provide rich insights about the

methods the community radio station uses to achieve local development. People who know the radio station and have been with it long enough to know what the station stands for and/or how it operates will be required. In addition, small population like these permits for the usage of purposive sampling.

This study targeted the station personnel as well as the community representatives. In rural areas like Kuruman, community representatives are often traditional leaders, political leaders such as councillors and members from different groups, including religious leaders. Thus, community leaders, such as people from villages with interest on community development, councillors, a pastor and political leaders from John Taolo Gaetsewe district of the Northern Cape province of South Africa were included in this study. This is because all these individuals are known to know everything that happens in their communities. Every activity that takes place within the region passes through them. Thus, the assumption is they know the contribution Kurara FM, as a community radio station in their region, makes to their communities. Furthermore, they are involved and informed of the development that happens within the region. All these individuals are known to have vested interests on community development and the welfare of their fellow community members.

The study had no predetermined sample size. It was guided by the principle of saturation. Saturation is a commonly known concept in qualitative research (Saunders *et al.*, 2018; Guest *et al.*, 2020:2; Mason, 2010). Because of the relatively small sample size in qualitative research, the principle of saturation is often applied to state that no new information will be obtained should there be more interviews (Fusch and Ness, 2015:1408; Guest *et al.*, 2020:2; Sarfo *et al.*, 2021:59; Saunders *et al.*, 2018). Thus, should participants give the same answers all over again, it means that saturation has been reached (Fusch and Ness, 2015; Guest *et al.*, 2020) as a result it will be “time to stop collecting information and start analysing what has been collected (Grady, cited by Saunders *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, this means that this study has no predetermined sample size. The sample size is free until there is a repetition of the answers participants give out. Subsequently, data for this study was collected from 7 participants from the community and 6 participants from the radio station.

Recruitment of participants

According to Patel *et al.* (2003:229) recruitment refers to the communication between “an investigator and a potential participant prior to the initiation of the consent process”. The recruitment process started with identifying, targeting and obtaining potential participants of a research study (Patel *et al.*, 2003:229). The process “involves providing information to the potential participants and generating their interest in the proposed study” (Patel *et al.*,

2003:229).

The study targets Kurara FM personnel. The recruitment process started with a face-to-face contact with the station manager requesting to speak to them as well as other station workers with knowledge of the strategies the community radio station uses to foster local development. This was followed by a formal email to seek gatekeeper permission (see Appendix A). According to Sutherland *et al.* (2013) using emails is one of the methods that can be used to recruit participants of a research study. "Email methods of recruitment provide a mechanism to contact eligible participants directly to invite them to participate in the research" (Sutherland *et al.*, 2013). The official email was once again sent to ask the station manager to identify relevant officials who will be able to assist with the information needed. The last email was to confirm the dates and times when the interviews will be recorded.

The recruitment process for community representatives involved face-to-face interactions. These are mostly traditional leaders in the region and ward councillors. A face-to-face contact with several community leaders was had requesting to speak to them about what they know about the ways Kurara FM uses to facilitate local development. A request was made to these leaders to recommend other leaders within the community who can provide with the required information and/or knowledge. Upon agreement, various communication tools were used, depending on availability. These included: whatsapp and emails. WhatsApp is one of the effective communication tools preferred by many. As a result, once I had their contacts, a sent out whatsapp texts and emails (again, depending on preference) to schedule a day and time when the interviews will be recorded.

Process of obtaining informed consent

Obtaining informed consent ensures that potential participants willingly agree to take part in the study. Thus, should understand clearly what the study is about and what is required of them. This means that potential participants should be well informed about the study; allowing them to decide if they are comfortable with taking the study or not.

Participants were adequately informed about the study: what is for and what is about. These participants were provided with information leaflets to further familiarise themselves with the study, ensuring that should they agree to participate; they will be participating from an informed perspective. Furthermore, they were encouraged to ask questions, ensuring that they fully understand. In addition, they were made aware that they are not compelled to participate but are volunteering their time to assist in academic research and will be free to withdraw from the study at any time without retribution. It was only after thorough

explanations and participants agreeing to participate in the study that they were asked to sign the standardised NWU BaSSREC informed consent agreement form.

4.4. Data collection

Data collection is the process of gathering information that will be used to answer research questions. Interviews with whose procedures described below were the main method for gathering data.

4.4.1. Interviews

The study adopted qualitative interviews. Interviews refer to a conversation between two or more people, where the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee answers (Lubombo, 2011:11). These interactions are usually face-to-face or physical but could also be virtual (Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:136). However, for this study, interviews were in a physical setting.

There are different types of interviews in research. Accordingly, Tisdell *et al.* (2025:137) states that research interviews might be “highly structured, questionnaire-driven, unstructured, open-ended or conversational formats”. Highly structured interviews are defined as interviews where the interviewer follows predetermined sets of questions without any deviations. Resulting in the interviewer failing to understand a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective (Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:138), based on this limitation, this study utilized semi-structured interviews following an Interview guide (Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews are non-rigid interviews, where the interview does not necessarily follow the interview guide (Lubombo, 2011:11; Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:138). This type of interview allows the interviewer to deviate from the set questions, in the sense that the interviewer does not necessarily follow the guide as is (Lubombo, 2011:11; Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:138). The interviewer may ask questions that were not on the questionnaire as follow-ups from what the interviewee provided (Lubombo, 2015:186; Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:138). This allows the interviewer to gain insight into the interviewee’s experience (Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:138).

Each interview was scheduled for at least 30 minutes. The interviews took place at the station, and because Setswana is the most spoken language in Kuruman, the interviews were held in both Setswana and English, depending on what the interviewee prefers or is comfortable with. The locations for community representatives were selected based on their convenience and accessibility due to their geographical diversity. Consequently, their locations varied.

With permission from each participant, all interviews were voice-recorded through a cell phone as part of the documentation process. Recording interviews “ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis” (Tisdell *et al.*, 2025:160). In addition, these audio records were useful during transcription processes.

4.5. Data analysis

The study employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) as its primary analytical framework, guided by Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication principles. Thematic is a word derived from the word theme; therefore, thematic analysis refers to a way of producing themes from the collected data. Accordingly, Clarke and Braun (2017:297) states that “thematic analysis is a method of analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data.” This method not only is useful to this study because it is a qualitative study, but also because people’s views, opinions, knowledge and experiences will be studied (Clarke & Braun, 2017:297). Additionally, community members are not homogenous, therefore, thematic analysis was useful to determine patterns and issues of common concerns and/or interest (themes) in the data.

Clarke and Braun (2017:298) argue that thematic analysis can be applied in both inductive and deductive analysis. Deductive analysis refers to attending to data with predetermined themes based on knowledge accumulated during data collection and/or research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006:12). Consequently, themes were predetermined based on existing knowledge and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006:12). The deductive orientation was used in this study to test predefined concepts such as power redistribution, dialogic engagement, and co-creation while remaining open to emergent themes derived from community-defined perspectives on empowerment. Anchoring analysis in prior theoretical frameworks yet accommodating inductive insights allows for balanced theory-testing with interpretive depth. This aligns with Stake’s (1995) instrumental case study design that allows the positioning Kurara FM as a lens for broader inquiry into participatory media’s transformative potential.

The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework, adapted to prioritise theoretical engagement. Initial familiarisation with data, that is transcripts (Figure 4.1) from semi structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), observational field notes, and station documents, involved repeated immersion to identify preliminary linkages between empirical observations and theoretical constructs.

Interview transcript: Community radio	
Title:	Community radio and social change in South Africa: How Kurara FM facilitates local development initiatives.
Date:	25 June 2025
Interviewee:	Kurara FM CEO and staff (Aus' Masego)
Interviewer:	Reitumetse Mooki
Duration:	42:46
Interviewer:	Thank you, Mr Mmusi, for taking time to talk to me. Please introduce your role in the station.
Mr Mmusi:	Good morning, my name is <u>Mosimaneotsile</u> Bradley Mmusi, also known as Sir Mmusi. I am the CEO of Kurara FM.
Interviewer:	Thank you again sir for taking time to assist me with my academic research. The first question I have here with me, is just to determine how Kurara FM fosters social change in Kuruman. In what ways does Kurara FM foster social change within the areas here?
Mr Mmusi:	As you know, Kurara FM is a community radio station that was launched on the 1 st of January 2012. It acts as a grassroots voice to the people of John Taolo Gaetsewe district. It's a platform for the voiceless. Acts a grassroots voice for the people through cultural appreciation, multilingual programming – Setswana, Afrikaans and English. We raise awareness about critical social issues, facilitate public dialogue and provide educational content. Content that inspires and informs our communities around John Taolo Gaetsewe and beyond the borders of our district. So, we work with different organizations to ensure that Kurara FM is a vehicle that educates people of John Taolo Gaetsewe. Meaning that we serve as a bridge between government, civil society and the community... promoting accountability and civil participation.
	Kurara FM serves as that engaging platform for the people of these rural areas. For them to participate in our programming, in terms of development, the news that they get from the radio station, and their participation generally. If you're in <u>Huningwele</u> , Masego can assist me – how many times does transport travel from Tsoe?
Masego:	Once a day.
Mr Mmusi:	You know... once a day. So those people depend on Kurara FM as a radio station to inform them, to give them the news. It also depends on Kurara FM if they've got community activities, for them to communicate their concerns, their developments within the community and the opportunities that are available. <u>And also</u> , through our programming participation, they call in, they WhatsApp their ideas, their views through our different programmes.
Interviewer:	Tell me about issues that they station focuses on. What issues does the station focus on?
Mr Mmusi:	Through our programming we address issues like unemployment, economic development, gender-based violence and human's right, youth development, health education, education, HIV, TB, mental health and other diseases. Substance abuse, crime prevention, traditional leadership and land issues; and access to basic services like water and electricity. Those are part of the issues we focus on.
Interviewer:	Why those specific issues?
Mr Mmusi:	As a community radio station, when you do your planning, you need to look at your district IDP, local municipality IDP; then you do your planning based on those IDPs, to say this is what needs to be done on the district IDP. For example, there is a housing project or water project, or there's crime issues. So, we plan according to those IDP and statistics that we get to say these are the main issues or concerns in our district that we need to address, that we need to bring in the municipality to engage... that we need to bring in different

Figure 4.1 Interview Transcript with Kurara FM CEO

As the process of immersion was underway, instances of †Khomani participation under participatory development's "co-creation" principle were coded. A structured codebook was developed using a priori codes derived from research objectives, for example, "marginalised voice inclusion," and "perceived empowerment"), which was iteratively refined during analysis to integrate unanticipated themes.

Coded data is synthesised into themes reflecting both theoretical expectations and contextual nuances. These themes undergo rigorous review for coherence and relevance through reflexive journaling, documenting my assumptions about participatory ideals and cross-validate interpretations against Stake's (1995) emphasis on holistic case complexity.

Thematic findings are then contextualized within Kuruman's socio-historical landscape through explanation-building techniques (Yin, 2018). This involved mapping observed practices such as †Khomani-led programming against Rodríguez's (2001) criteria for citizen media to assess whether Kurara FM's strategies transcend hierarchical legacies or inadvertently reproduce them.

4.6. Ensuring quality of the study

Ensuring quality in research is critical because empirical findings are expected to contribute to a broader body of knowledge in ways that are credible, trustworthy and analytically

meaningful. Tracy (2010) proposes a widely cited set of “big-tent” criteria for qualitative quality-worthiness of the topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence; which together provide a broad benchmark for assessing the robustness of interpretive work (Tracy 2010; Yadav 2022:684). Guided by these touchstones, this study sought to ensure that the focus on community radio and social change in Kuruman is theoretically and socially worthwhile; that sufficient and appropriate data were generated; and that the analysis is transparent, ethically grounded and meaningfully aligned with the study’s aims, research questions and theoretical framework.

To operationalise the above, the study drew on Rocco’s (2010) criteria for integrating theory, literature and methodological choices in a coherent and traceable way. First, relevant theory was carefully selected and explicitly articulated to frame the inquiry, with participatory communication, Media Advocacy Theory, development media theory and agenda-setting theory providing the conceptual lens for designing the study and interpreting the findings (Rocco 2010:376–377). Secondly, a focused but comprehensive review of appropriate literature on community radio, social change and participation was undertaken, with systematic citation to locate the study within existing scholarship and to avoid anecdotal or decontextualised claims (Rocco 2010:377). Thirdly, the limitations of the study—particularly its single-case design, contextual specificity and reliance on qualitative data—are openly acknowledged and discussed in the subsequent section, in line with Rocco’s insistence that quality requires critical reflection on the boundaries of one’s claims (Rocco 2010:377).

In keeping with Tracy’s (2010) emphasis on sincerity and credibility, the study approached the field with a commitment to transparency and reflexivity. Efforts were made to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of Kurara FM personnel and community leaders, which is central to qualitative inquiry. This included careful documentation of sampling decisions, interview procedures and analytic steps, as well as reflexive consideration of the researcher’s positionality and its potential influence on the generation and interpretation of data. Credibility was further supported through prolonged engagement with the case, the use of multiple data sources (interviews, station documents and programming), and close attention to internal coherence between the empirical material and the interpretive claims advanced in later chapters (Tracy 2010).

Ethical considerations, discussed fully below, were integral to the quality of the study, particularly because it involved interviews with human participants in a relatively small and interconnected community. In line with institutional ethics requirements, informed consent was obtained from all participants; issues of confidentiality and anonymity were carefully addressed; and care was taken to represent participants’ accounts in ways that are accurate

and respectful. Given the sensitivity of some of the issues discussed such as local governance, service delivery and intra-community tensions, the ethics of representation and potential risks of harm were treated not as procedural formalities but as ongoing concerns throughout the research process. The ethical matters are elaborated in the following section.

Finally, attention to quality extended to the written product. This dissertation was subjected to thorough editing and proofreading to enhance clarity, coherence and readability, thereby supporting meaningful coherence between the research aims, theoretical framing, methodological choices, analysis and final textual presentation (Rocco 2010:377; Tracy 2010).

4.7. Ethical considerations

Ethics are an important aspect of every research, especially when dealing with people to ensure that they are not harmed in any way. The study was guided by the North-West University guidelines for conducting ethical research. Before the commencement of the study, an ethical clearance (Appendix C) was obtained from the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) which oversees the ethical review process for research involving human participants within the Faculty of Humanities (BaSSREC@humanities.nwu.ac.za). Here, it is important to highlight the three key ethical principles that were adhered to in this study, and how they were ensured.

4.7.1. Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation is a fundamental ethical principle in research, ensuring that individuals engage in a study of their own free will, without coercion or undue influence (Babbie, 2013). To guarantee that participation is genuinely voluntary, several measures will be implemented. First, informed consent was obtained by thoroughly briefing participants on the study's purpose, potential benefits, and any associated risks (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Second, participants received clear and comprehensive information, enabling them to make an informed decision about their involvement (Israel & Hay, 2006). Third, participation was entirely voluntary, allowing individuals to freely decide whether to join or decline the study without any external pressure. Finally, participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without penalty, ensuring their autonomy throughout the process (Wiles, 2012). By adhering to these steps, the study upholds the ethical standards of voluntary participation and informed consent.

4.7.2. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the ethical principles in research that ensures the protection of personal information and/or identity (Wiles, 2013). Participants often agree to the study with terms that their information will be protected and used for research purposes only and protected from outside authorities (Israel & Hay, 2006; Wiles, 2013). To ensure confidentiality, participants' identification information is not revealed (Babbie, 2013). Participants remain anonymous unless as requested (Wiles, 2013). Anonymised quotations from participants are ensured to centre their voices, while cultural sensitivity frameworks guide interpretations of their empowerment narratives beyond Eurocentric paradigms. Had a participant requested that certain information not be used, the information will have been removed as per the participant's request (Wiles, 2013).

4.7.3. Non-maleficence

Potential harm is dependent on the researcher's data collection method (Babbie, 2013). Potential harm "may include emotional or psychological distress, as well physical harm" (Babbie, 2013). Social science study is unlikely to cause harm. However, potential harm to arise in a social science study involves "psychological distress, discomfort, social disadvantage, invasion of privacy or infringement of rights" (Israel & Hay, 2006). The nature of this study does not impose harm to participants. This is not least because the study does not probe personal questions. The study respected participants, their dignity, privacy and autonomy (Bos, 2020).

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and justified the methodological choices underpinning the study of Kurara FM as a community radio station facilitating social change and local development in Kuruman. Working within a qualitative research paradigm, the study adopted an instrumental case study design to enable a contextually rich, thick description of Kurara FM's operations and its relationship with the communities it serves. The chapter further detailed the procedures for generating and analysing data. Issues of quality and ethics were also addressed. The next chapter turns to the empirical findings, presenting an analysis of how Kurara FM's governance, programming and everyday practices embody, negotiate or fall short of the participatory and advocacy-oriented roles envisaged in the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW KURARA FM FACILITATES LOCAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with Kurara FM personnel and community leaders in Kuruman. The analysis is structured around the four research questions and employs a deductive thematic analytic approach described in the previous chapter. It draws analytical insights from the six philosophical assumptions of participatory development communication theory articulated by Dervin & Huesca (1999). These are further supported by two mass media theories outlined in Chapter 3, the Media Advocacy Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory both of which provide a conceptual framework for examining how Kurara FM, as a community radio and broadcast media, navigates the complex intersections of participation, power, and development. While the theoretical framework provides the lens, the chapter foregrounds participants' accounts of Kurara FM's operations as a development actor.

The findings are presented in four sections. The first examines the station's strategies for information dissemination and participatory engagement, with a focus on showing how authority and *expertise* are negotiated in program design. The second considers the ways in which the marginalised groups are enabled (or constrained) to participate in content creation. The section highlights *cultural relativity* and *constructivist* dimensions. The third explores community members' perceptions of the station's role in empowering local voices, engaging with tensions between individual voice and collective identity. The final section assesses whether Kurara FM's practices reflect grassroots-driven development or reproduce hierarchical dynamics. Here, the section engages with *communitarianism* and competing claims to authority. Together, these findings demonstrate that Kurara FM has created important spaces for dialogue and local agency yet remains entangled in challenges of resource dependence and uneven participation. This duality underscores both the potential and the limitations of community radio as a vehicle for grassroots development in South Africa.

5.2. Strategies of information dissemination and community engagement

This section presents the findings related to how Kurara FM disseminates information and fosters participatory engagement within the John Taolo Gaetsewe District. Drawing on interview data from both station personnel and community leaders, the analysis demonstrates that Kurara FM does more than just broadcast news—it functions as a platform for social dialogue, youth empowerment, cultural preservation, and developmental advocacy. The findings are discussed thematically and supported by theoretical perspectives drawn from

participatory development communication (Dervin & Huesca, 1999), media advocacy theory (Wallack, 1994), and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These frameworks help unpack the dynamics of power, voice, and access embedded in the station's practices.

5.2.1. Programme structure and thematic content

Located in the heart of John Taolo Gaetsewe District, Kurara FM plays a vital role as a local content broadcaster. According to participants, the station serves as a primary source of news and information, keeping the community informed about what is happening in the John Taolo Gaetsewe district. This positions the station as a key vehicle for localised knowledge dissemination, an essential feature of community radio as outlined by Nkoala and Motsaathebe (2024:2).

Beyond information provision, the station was described as actively engaging in educational programming and raising awareness about pressing social development challenges in the community. Mr. Khonkhobe, Kurara FM's programme manager, highlighted that their programming structure is designed to address various social issues faced by the community, ranging from gender-based violence (GBV) to youth development.

We have the structure of the programmes. Let's make an example with the breakfast show, the breakfast show is contemporary programme that addresses many factors or issues our listeners are experiencing. You can discuss the GBV there because it's a broader programme. Then you go to 9-12 show that deals with health issues and domestic matters. Domestic matters in this sense could be divorce, GBV, or even teenage pregnancy. But also, teenage pregnancy you can discuss on the 3-6 programme which is a programme that was formulated to address youth issues. It can be your crime, talent development (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025).

This was supported by one of the station's presenters who added that:

Well, from the presenter's side, I'd say we touch on everything because we basically engage with the community on everyday basis. We engage in terms of unemployment, I mean we have topics and discussions that we have. We also use our Facebook page to engage with the community. So, we basically engage topic wise... education, health, we also touch on spirituality because we have a slot in the morning where we pray. We basically talk about anything that happens in the communities around us. We also touch on different mental health issues and with that it's an engagement from the community, because it's on radio, we get to broadcast that (Mapule Interview, 2025).

The statement above indicates that the station has a structured approach that aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory, which argues that media can shape public attention by strategically prioritising certain issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Kurara FM leverages this capacity by curating topic-specific shows that reflect the daily realities and needs of its audience. The station not only provides relevant information but also engages with the developmental aspirations of its community, particularly its youth.

This programming model also aligns with the Media Advocacy Theory (Wallack, 1994) which argues that media platforms can be used strategically by communities to highlight critical social issues and drive change. For Nkoala and Motsaathebe's (2024:2), community radio plays a critical role in broadcasting social issues relevant to its respective communities. By airing programmes that address domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and crime, Kurara FM positions itself as a media advocate for social transformation.

5.2.2. Youth development and talent promotion

Furthermore, the station makes contributions to youth development. The station manager further shared that the station not only addresses youth issues on-air but also actively provides platforms for young and upcoming talents to express themselves and build their skills. For example, the station had recently run a youth-focused programme that gave aspiring radio presenters from the district opportunities to showcase their talents.

Last year we had a youth programme for Youth Month where we had our youth come and showcase their talents. Because we might be having talented individuals in our region, but if we don't give them the opportunity, where do we expect them to get the platform to express themselves? Singers, we have talented singers. Over the weekend, we have people come in to showcase their singing talents on the show. If someone has released a song, we invite them over and open the listening for the community to comment on the local artist's song (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025).

The station's CEO, Mr Mmusi further affirmed this role:

Local musicians bring in their music. We interview them, we talk about their profiles, and that becomes content (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

This demonstrates Kurara FM's multidimensional support for youth and local artists. These contributions fall squarely within the developmental role of community radio, which scholars like Bulani *et al.* (2024:61) and Tucker (2013:395) argue should extend beyond news dissemination to supporting local talent, creativity, and empowerment.

Specifically, three key contributions of the station to its community emerge, including:

1. Youth development through skills exposure and training,
2. Localised content generation through music and cultural participation, and
3. Youth empowerment through inclusive representation.

These elements are essential for any community radio station, as scholars argue that community radio is not only meant to inform but also to contribute to the development of its community. It should add positive value to its listeners, celebrate, and promote local talent and artists. Accordingly, Bulani *et al.* (2024:61) argues that one of the key regulations governing community radio is its role as a platform for local artists to promote their music. Similarly, Tucker (2013:395) posits that community radio should not only focus on its community news and issues affecting its community, but to also promote local talent. In line with this, Kurara FM fulfils this responsibility by providing a space for local artists to showcase their talents and promote their work. Affording a platform to local artists to showcase their talents contributes to a key feature of community radio: access. It gives them access to a platform where they are seen as local artists, as they are often overlooked by mainstream media. Access is a foundational concept in both participatory communication theory (Servaes, 1999; Dervin & Huesca, 1999) and community media scholarship (Howley, 2005).

Community members, particularly those marginalised by mainstream media, gain a platform to share their voices and cultural expression. Indeed, community radio stations were established for accessibility concerns, to give the marginalised access to a community medium, a platform that serves the community's communication needs (Howley, 2005:2; Mtimde, 2024:11). A medium where they can hear about their communities and about themselves. Accordingly, these mediums are viewed as the mirror of the community, reflecting the day-to-day lives of the society to which they are based. Kurara FM does this by engaging with its listeners and airing matters that the community is facing. This is confirmed by one of the station's presenters:

We basically engage topic wise... education, health, we also touch on spirituality because we have a slot in the morning where we pray. We basically talk about anything that happens in the communities around us. We also touch on different mental health issues (Modiegi Interview, June 2025).

Adding to this, another presenter noted that the station disseminates information related to crime such as the shootings that happened in Kuruman around May – June 2025. This shows the station's commitment to responsive, localised information sharing, a hallmark of community-based agenda-setting achieved through actively broadcasting news and information about their environment.

5.2.3. Language use and cultural preservation

Language plays an important role in community radio. As such, Kurara FM broadcasts or disseminates information in the district's three most commonly spoken language: Setswana, Afrikaans, and English. This multilingual approach is essential in ensuring accessibility for a diverse listenership, as well as promoting cultural inclusion. Broadcasting in local language not only make it easier for the community to understanding content, but it also allows them to actively participate in the shows and gives them a sense of belonging.

Aiseng (2024:26) argues that community radio stations play a critical role in the preservation and restoration of indigenous language. This is evident in the case of Kurara FM through the use of Setswana – for Batswana, and Afrikaans – for the coloured and Afrikaans speaking communities in locations such as Wrenchville. By making use of these languages, the station contributes to the restoration and sustainability of these languages.

Importantly, the station also serves as a site for informal language learning. Aiseng (2024:29) further argues that community radio stations not only contribute to the revitalisation of indigenous languages but also serve as effective tools for introducing these languages to new speakers. John Taolo Gaetsewe district is a mining district that attracts individuals from various parts of the country seeking employment. Many of these individuals are not native Setswana speakers, yet through regular exposure to Kurara FM, these non-Setswana speakers are gradually introduced to the language in everyday contexts. This exposure encourages informal language learning, enabling newcomers to engage with the local culture and communicate more effectively within the community.

The preservation of local cultures is another key function of Kurara FM. Community radio stations are widely recognised as effective platforms for preserving and promoting local cultures and languages (Pandey, 2024:8). They achieve this through music, cultural programmes and local languages (Pandey, 2024:8). Kurara FM serves as a notable example. Data collected indicates that the station actively contributes to cultural preservation through its commitment to airing traditional music, hosting cultural groups, conducting interviews, and broadcasting in local languages.

There is a show where they will be interviewing community members even in cultural programs, like traditional music or even cultural matters, where Kurara FM will teach the community about their cultural knowledge (Modiri Interview, June 2025).

Participants also noted that traditional music performers are occasionally invited to the station as part of its cultural programming. Through such initiatives, the station actively embraces and

reinforces the cultural identities of its community, offering a platform for cultural expression and continuity (Pandey, 2024). Speaking on this, one of the participants said:

I know if you have a choir or cultural dance group, Kurara FM can give you the opportunity to go sing. So, if the community have an event or ceremony, they know who to talk to (Modiri Interview, June 2025).

By doing so, the station not only embraces and promotes local culture, but also provides exposure for local artists and empowers them through media representation. As such, it contributes to both cultural preservation and community development, as artists gain recognition and opportunities while audiences remain connected to their heritage. These practices reflect the constructivist and cultural relativity dimensions of participatory communication theory, which emphasise that community members should be active producers of knowledge and meaning within their own cultural context (Dervin & Huesca, 1999). By embracing cultural programming, Kurara FM helps reinforce local identities and contributes to cultural continuity.

5.2.4. Partnerships and information dissemination

Kurara FM does not work in isolation. It frequently collaborates with local organisations in the district such as SIOC Community Development Trust, JTG Trust and South32 to broadcast information about development initiatives by these organisations. These partnerships expand the station's developmental reach by offering listeners updates on educational, infrastructure, and community upliftment programmes. In such cases, the station contributes to the development of the community.

Community radio stations in South Africa were established for marginalised communities to have access to a platform that serves their needs and aspirations (Bosch, 2018:7). Kurara FM aligns with Media Advocacy Theory which promotes the use of media to amplify development efforts and connect communities with resources and decision-makers (Wallack, 1994). Despite this achievement, the study revealed that Kurara FM's reach is not equally distributed across the district. Several participants expressed concern that residents in more remote areas do not receive broadcasts or information about development projects, which then creates a gap in the efforts to drive social change.

Kurara FM does disseminate information from SIOC and JTG Trust. However, the information is not reaching most of the far communities. Even when, for example these mines want to come up with projects to like to fix your road, most of the community that are benefiting from these projects are those near Kurara FM (Moeti, June 2025).

This critique highlights a disconnect between Kurara FM's mission of inclusivity and the realities of its signal limitations. When speaking to the station, the station's CEO reported that the station provides coverage to all communities including those distant areas such as Heuningvlei, and beyond.

You know you've got people in the far deep rural areas of John Taolo Gaetsewe... who are far from the cities, from the town. People whose stories are unheard, people whose concerns are not heard... so Kurara FM serves as that engaging platform for the people of these rural areas (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

The contrasting views from community members suggest that participatory access remains uneven. From a participatory development standpoint, such disparities undermine the principle of equitable representation and can inadvertently reproduce patterns of marginalisation (Dervin & Huesca, 1999).

5.2.5. Enabling marginalised communities in content creation

This section responds to the second research objective: evaluating how Kurara FM enables marginalised communities such as the †Khomani and other historically excluded groups to actively participate in content creation. Using evidence from interviews and programme analysis, the section interrogates whether the station facilitates inclusive participation in content development, not only as listeners but as co-creators. Framed through the constructivist and cultural relativity assumptions of participatory development communication, the section explores how the station shapes the ability of marginalised groups to see themselves reflected in the station's programming. The findings reveal both promising practices and ongoing limitations in realising equitable media participation.

5.2.6. Participation through content development

Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021:6) notes the importance of the community's participation in content development of the station, they argue that community participation ensures that content aired is relevant and adds value to the community needs and aspirations. This is because community radio is rooted in serving local community needs. Accordingly, promoting community participation in content creation is one of the most effective strategies for ensuring that content remains relevant to the community.

The findings revealed that community members participate in the station through call-ins and social media. This enables real time contributions to discussions (Bosch, 2013). In addition, the station highlighted that sometimes community members come into the station to share content ideas or things they want aired.

Community member comes in and say, I've got this project. I want to talk about this. That becomes content when you approve it. Community members come in and say crime is high, let's talk about this, involve community members leaders – call community leaders for interviews. Call SAPS for the interview. When you call them that becomes content that goes on air. The community calls in, they give in their input, they discuss this. Community comes in and says but we've got the challenges of water. We need the municipality to come and talk to us. The municipality is unable to come to us. But they are able to come to the radio (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025).

The above statement does not only highlight enabling the community in content creation, but it also reflects elements of participatory communication to development where the community is able to decide what they want for themselves (Servaes, 2008:168), as well as media advocacy efforts.

Adding on to this, one of the key station personnel added that community members participate in content development through their news department.

I don't know if this would make sense. But for example, in the newsroom we have... I don't know if I should say it's a promo. But when something happens in our communities, we encourage our community members to let us know, so we could be part of whatever that is. So, I think, that is one of the ways we try to encourage participation... we encourage our local community members to let us know if something is happening in their community, so we could be there to cover it (Modiegi, June 2025).

Media advocacy is defined as a strategic use of the media to raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes that address issues of concern, with an aim to achieving social change (Wallack, 1994:421). Accordingly, the station aligns with this theory through the dissemination of issues the community bring to the station.

As Mr Kay said, some comes to us. We had people coming in, saying the municipality is hiring people they know in the mall project. So, they come to us as the news department, requesting that we help them with this matter. From there we have to invite the mayor or the MM to come and answer to all the allegations (Modiegi, June 2025).

This practice reflects the constructivist element of participatory communication theory, which emphasises the role of community radio in providing a platform for community members to share their stories.

Furthermore, the station allows the community to engage with the local authority when invited to the station to account.

Yes, we open lines for the listeners to call and ask questions. We then have to respond to those questions (Mapule, June 2025).

This indicates that Kurara FM is a trusted platform for community engagement and accountability. The station reflects a notable example of a community radio as a platform where community members can hold to account their local leaders (Aloyce, 2013:39). And the effectiveness of Kurara FM as a platform where community members can engage with the local government on local issues (Pandey, 2024:7).

Many other examples include contacting the station to complain about the conditions of government's health department.

At some point there was an issue with Kuruman hospital's lack of services, poor sanitation and shortage of beds. The community phoned the newsroom with the matter, then we followed up on the story. As I said, you cannot run with a one-sided story, so we had to call the hospital's spokesperson to respond. That's when the MEC of health came to clear and/or to speak on those things that the community complained about. They, therefore, had a campaign in Wrenchville – the campaign wasn't even a month ago (Mapule, June 2025).

This demonstrates Kurara FM's efforts to driving social change, thereby addressing conditions that puts the livelihoods of the community at risk (Pandit, 2014:172).

When asked what the campaign was about the station responded by saying:

The MEC was here to address all the issues the community had about the hospital. The MEC promised to better the condition of the hospital (Mapule, June 2025).

This shows that, when strategically employed, community radio stations can advocate for the changes its communities call for by pressuring local authorities to respond to community concerns. In addition, this shows that indeed together with the community, community radio can hold the executive accountable (Wallack, 1994:421; Waisbord, 2020:117).

5.2.7. Enabling community participation in content creation through news department

Kurara FM makes significant contribution through its news department. Statements from participants' responses highlights that co-content development primarily stem from the news division, rather than from the station's regular programming. The station actively involves the community through its news department, with community members frequently visiting or calling in to share concerns and stories. This engagement allows the station to prioritise local

issues, conduct follow-ups, and ensure that community voices are reflected in the news. However, other relevant matters that fall outside the scope of news coverage are subject to the discretion of the station's programme manager, as programming is often guided by structured frameworks such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and other government publications.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the topics discussed on Kurara FM are largely predetermined and shaped by external policy priorities. For example, issues such as gender-based violence and Femicide (GBVF), teenage pregnancies, and alcohol abuse are regularly featured in the station's programming. This is due to the provincial government's identification of John Taolo Gaetsewe district as having some of the highest rates of these social challenges. In response, Kurara FM incorporated these themes into its content to align with public health and social development efforts. In addition, the findings demonstrate that the community is not actively involved in selecting programme topics and is instead positioned as passive recipients of the station's content. This raises concerns about the extent to which Kurara FM truly reflects grassroots interests and promotes participatory communication.

Dalene (2007) rejects predetermined programmes, stating that it limits community members to passive participation. This is because programmes of the stations should be developed by the community itself, since they know what they need (Al-Hassen *et al.*, 2011:2). Therefore, should take advantage of the community radio station to discuss their own societal issues and developmental aspirations. Communication for development depends on dialogue (Dalene, 2007), however, this is not the case with Kurara FM as the community consumes programmes, they did not have any influence over but is shaped by IDPs and provincial stats.

As a community radio station, when you do your planning, you need to look at your district IDP, local municipality IDP; then you do your planning based on those IDPs, to say this is what needs to be done on the district IDP. For example, there is a housing project or water project, or there's crime issues. So, we plan according to those IDP and statistics that we get to say these are the main issues or concerns in our district that we need to address, that we need to bring in the municipality to engage... that we need to bring in different organizations to engage in terms of educating the people (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

This means the station take decisions without consulting the community. The station decides what goes on air, which programmes to broadcast thus taking power away from the community to decide for themselves as the "owners" of the station. This presents a top-down approach instead of the bottom-up approach nature of community radio stations. Many scholars ruled this as a challenge to community participation in programming.

Engaging the community in programming decisions is essential for ensuring that the station's broadcasts are aligned with the developmental needs and priorities of the community (Bamigboye & Osunkunle, 2021). This practice maintains the bottom-up nature of community stations. Furthermore, community participation is vital for the sustainability of the station, "as it gives meaning and effect to ownership and control by the community" (Mtimde, 2024:14). Therefore, Kurara FM should allow community members into its programming decisions, to uphold the relevance of programming to community development which will in turn maintain and keep the radio's audience – that is, the community of the John Taolo Gaetsewe.

While there is some opportunity for community participation in the station's content development, through the station's news department, the extent to which marginalised communities are included remains unclear. Participants noted that even if such opportunities exist, they are typically accessed by individuals living in nearby areas. Remote communities such as Van Zyl and Heuningvlei continue to be excluded, largely due to the station's limited coverage. As a result, residents in these areas are unable to engage with the station - whether through content creation or programming because they simply cannot reach it.

5.2.8. Community perceptions of voice, empowerment and identity

This section addresses the third research objective by analysing how community members perceive Kurara FM's contributions to social change, voice, and empowerment. Drawing on qualitative narratives from a range of community representatives, the discussion explores how individuals experience the station's role in amplifying local voices, building a sense of inclusion, and navigating collective identity in a post-apartheid, culturally diverse context. Particular attention is given to the tension between individual expression and communal representation, as well as the emotional and symbolic value community members attach to having their stories heard. The findings are analysed through the lens of participatory communication theory, especially its emphasis on voice, identity, and communicative agency.

The data of this study reveals that Kurara FM serves as an important platform for local news and information dissemination. According to participants, the community radio station keeps them informed about news and information about what is happening in the district (John Taolo Gaetsewe). As such Kurara FM meets the mandate of a community medium as argued that these mediums were established to provide the local population with news and information relevant to their locale. In addition, community media provides educational programs that reflects social conditions of its community (Nassanga, 2009:44). Kurara FM fulfils this mandate by providing content that not only informs its community but also educates them.

The study suggests that Kurara FM empower its listeners through information they can use to better their lives.

As I said, it is doing its level best to give people information, it will only depend on how the people uses that information to contribute to their development. But they are giving people reasonable information about the opportunities around Kuruman. It is really a medium of communication (Mokalanyaane, June 2025).

The above statement shows that people do need the station for information they need to make positive contribution to their lives.

Through its relevant local news dissemination and watchdog functions, the station has empowered the community to take initiative and hold local authorities accountable. This is evident in statements from community members who frequently use the station to call on the local municipality to respond to their concerns. This relates not only to media advocacy but also to Bosch (2013) argument that community radio serves as a platform to empower communities to articulate their needs and demand accountability from power structures.

Additionally, community members often invite the station to attend and broadcast their community meetings, using the platform to highlight pressing issues.

Some community meetings, like if the community is discussing water scarcity, that makes news. If we go cover that, we will then invite the municipality to come and respond. Like they would say, on a certain day they will be having a meeting at a certain time, from there they give us the agenda. We will be discussing electricity shortages because the municipality has been quiet about electricity poles. We will then assign a journalist, who will go in the meeting and gather facts and comes back to package it; so that those who missed the bulletins can now catch up (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025).

By airing these meetings, the radio station also helps raise public awareness about the challenges faced by the community.

Kurara FM highlighted that it empowers women by providing vital information related to health and finances. This is especially important because, as the saying goes, "health is wealth" - a concept that underscores how good health enables individuals to pursue economic opportunities and contribute meaningfully to society. By disseminating health-related information, the station supports community development and promotes social change. Previous studies have proven that community radio is proficient in broadcasting health-related information to prompt community members to take proper actions towards their health and their children's. Kurara FM practices also demonstrates the successful dissemination of

health-related information. This approach is important because health information disseminated through community radio stations promotes healthier lifestyle by addressing specific needs and issues of the community (Asuman & Moodley, 2023:397). Subsequently, financial literacy is vital to empower women to be independent, to start businesses and become financially independent, thus breaking away from circles of poverty and contributing to the economy of the community.

Furthermore, Kurara FM empowers local youth, particularly artists, by providing them with a platform to showcase their work, which significantly increases their exposure. This is valuable to the community because once people become aware of individuals or groups with specific talents, they can invite or book them for local ceremonies and events.

I know if you have a choir or cultural dance group, Kurara FM can give you the opportunity to go sing. So, if the community have an event or ceremony, they know who to talk to (Mpho Interview, June 2025).

Speaking to the station's CEO on how the station empowers the community, the station shared that they previously partnered with some local stakeholders to empower young people in youth and farming.

Kurara FM has trained 15 young people in terms of photography in partnership with Kumba. Kurara FM in partnership with the department and also with Matlhoko dynasty, Kurara FM has empowered young people in terms of farming. If you go to into chicken, you get a start-up. If you go to cattle farming, you get a start-up... in that direction. At the current moment, there is a learnership that is running in partnership with AMG Training and SITA, where currently young people are on a learnership. We've had two interns, who forms part. And previously, Kurara FM has in the past six years, in partnership with Kuruman Campus college (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

This shows that Kurara FM necessitates youth empowerment. This is important because it contributes to development. According to Bulani *et al.* (2024:52) youth empowerment is an important element for development and social change because youth are considered the backbone of society. The idea is when young people are given opportunities to grow, express themselves, and contribute meaningfully, they become active agents of progress within their communities.

The perceptions discussed in the previous section reveal that while community members recognise Kurara FM as an important platform for expression and empowerment, their experiences also point to underlying tensions regarding who truly holds power over content, representation, and decision-making. These tensions signal a deeper structural question

about whether the station's practices genuinely advance grassroots participation or merely reproduce existing hierarchies of control. It is this contradiction that the following section explores in greater depth.

5.2.9. The participation paradox: Power, voice, and development in Kurara FM's practices

This final section addresses the fourth research objective, which critically examines whether Kurara FM's practices embody a genuinely grassroots-driven model of development or whether they inadvertently reproduce hierarchical structures of power. This tension, that is referred to here as the paradox of participation. Power lies at the heart of participatory communication discourse, where efforts to democratise, communication often coexist with managerial and institutional constraints. Drawing on insights from participatory development communication theory (Dervin & Huesca, 1999) and media advocacy theory (Wallack, 1994), the analysis interrogates how ideals of inclusivity and community ownership are enacted or limited within the station's governance and operational practices. The patterns of participation, decision-making, and accountability are examined to expose the contradictions between Kurara FM's stated commitment to grassroots empowerment and the structural realities that shape its functioning within a historically fragmented social context.

5.2.10. Uneven participation and representation

As highlighted in preceding sections, Kurara FM's broadcast coverage is uneven across the John Taolo Gaetsewe District. Community members from remote settlements such as Heuningvlei, Gasehunelo and the furthest of them all, Van Zyl expressed that they feel excluded from the station's reach and representation as they are unable access the signal due to the station's technical limitations. This suggests that community members from these communities do not have access to a community radio station, thus are excluded from the media narrative. As one participant lamented,

It looks like the station has forgotten about us (Mokalanyane Interview, June 2025). Even in relatively proximate areas such as Batlharos, participants noted that they can only tune in while driving: the station's signal is unavailable in homes but reachable in cars. This points to a technical and symbolic exclusion where marginalised communities lack not only access to the airwaves but also a sense of belonging in the mediated public sphere (Bosch, 2014).

This limitation challenges one of the core philosophical assumptions of participatory communication that access to communication is a prerequisite for participation (Servaes, 1999). In the case of Kurara FM, exclusion from coverage zones translates directly into

exclusion from the processes of dialogue, meaning-making, and representation, rendering some communities' silent spectators rather than active participants. As one community member puts it,

I can say most of the communities far from town are just spectators. They are like just bench sitters; they are just listeners (Mokalanyane, June 2025).

This suggests that the station, rather than allowing the community to speak for themselves, often speaks on their behalf. In doing so, it positions itself more like a commercial station, potentially neglecting marginalised communities and focusing its activities primarily on central or more prominent communities. Such structural inequalities undermine the communitarian ethos of community radio, which is supposed to give a collective voice to the voiceless and bridge geographical and social divides.

5.2.11. Commercial influence and the erosion of grassroots ethos

Participants observed that Kurara FM's increasing reliance on advertising has introduced a commercial orientation that sometimes overshadows its developmental mandate. Many participants described the station as operating "more like a commercial station," with local businesses frequently promoted on air. While community stations are permitted to generate limited revenue through local advertising (Bulani *et al.*, 2024), an overreliance on commercial income risks compromising editorial independence and the participatory purpose of community media. Community radio stations may advertise local businesses to promote and motivate community members to support these businesses. However, advertising means financial gains, thus poses a threat to the operations of the station since these stations are not for financial gains.

When asked about the station's perceived role, many respondents associated Kurara FM primarily with "local news and advertisements," suggesting that financial sustainability may be influencing content priorities. This reflects Wallack's (1994) concern that media advocacy, when driven by institutional or financial imperatives, can shift from empowering citizens to serving elite or market interests. Such tendencies, while not unusual in resource-constrained community radio environments, raise critical questions about whose voices are amplified and whose are muted in the pursuit of financial viability.

Research on African community radio reveals significant challenges in achieving genuine participatory communication, with elite and institutional voices often dominating despite democratic aspirations. In post-apartheid South Africa, community radio stations struggle to dissociate from elite practices, as economic barriers prevent meaningful citizen participation (Tsarwe, 2014). High poverty levels make studio participation through phone calls unattainable

for ordinary citizens, while elite frames taint programming and alienate audiences (Tsarwe, 2014).

Although South Africa's three-tier broadcasting system replaced state monopoly with community options, ongoing challenges persist in marginalised communities (Olorunnisola, 2002). Contemporary evidence shows that while some communities successfully activate citizen involvement in content co-production, state control mechanisms continue operating through policy regimes (Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2020).

In East Africa, donor funding structures fundamentally undermine community radio's theoretical benefits, creating external political and economic influences that position communities as recipients rather than active participants in media-making (Conrad, 2014). Kurara FM's centralised decision-making and alignment with institutional and commercial agendas echo this critique. This shows how community radio can unintentionally reinforce the hierarchies it aims to dismantle.

5.2.12. Agenda-setting and issues of prioritisation

Kurara FM also functions as an agenda-setter for public discussion in the district. According to the station's CEO and Programme Manager, programming frequently focuses on issues that relates to poor local governance, GBVF, teenage pregnancy and every topic prioritised in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). As previously discussed, Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Coleman *et al.*, 2009) posits that media influence public attention by highlighting particular issues. In Kurara FM's case, however, agenda-setting appears to be guided by institutional frameworks rather than community-driven priorities. The station and community members indicated that there is a list of items that are prioritised by the station. Through agenda-setting, Kurara FM helps raise awareness of issues that its selected communities are experiencing, however, these issues are guided by the station's programmes which should address items on the IDP and government publications, thus, if an issue does not fall within the scope, it leaves the programme director to decide whether the item will be figured or not.

When asked if that's how the station identifies issues to broadcast (through IPDs), the station's CEO responded:

Yes, that's how we identify issues and also, we identify issues as the community comes to the station and request help. Also, how our news department goes around John Taolo Gaetsewe and along the way they identify those issues. We also get some of these stuff from StatsSA & news in general, that's how we identify issues (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

Clearly, this approach arguably allows the station to raise awareness of recognised community concerns while at the same time constraining its responsiveness to emergent, locally defined issues. This point was further highlighted when the station alluded to an NGO which was addressing GBVF.

We were approached by NGO. According to the email she sent to us, they stated that they have been going around JTG and realised that GBV is one of the challenges in our district. She said, she has been going around trying to see what the challenges in our district are and GBV topped the list. Hence, she approached the station for airtime, requesting that we cover the round table with various stakeholders, from our government, SAPS and other NGOs, (Programme Manager Interview, June 2025).

While this collaboration underscores Kurara FM's advocacy role, it also highlights a dependency on formal institutions and NGOs to define "worthy" issues, potentially sidelining grassroots voices. Apart from the station allowing issues that falls under the station's programming scope, it is difficult to say if the station does allow ordinary community members to come up with such or if it only serves certain structures within the community.

Allowing ordinary community members such advantages is important because scholars note of powerful local actor who use radio as an instrument of influence, rather than empowerment, thereby eroding station's credibility as a community-driven platform. Tucker (2013:393) underscores the necessity for stations to recognise and actively address these power dynamics to avoid privileging elites over ordinary listeners. For Tucker (2013:393), such dynamics enable powerful local actors to use radio as an instrument of influence rather than empowerment, thereby weakening its legitimacy as a community-driven platform.

5.3. Media advocacy and development agendas

From a media advocacy perspective, Kurara FM uses its structured programming to highlight developmental themes such as unemployment, youth and economic development, as well as health information. As the CEO stated,

Through our programming we address issues like unemployment, economic development, gender-based violence and human's right, youth development, health education, education, HIV, TB, mental health and other diseases. Substance abuse, crime prevention, traditional leadership and land issues; and access to basic services like water and electricity. Those are part of the issues we focus on (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

While these thematic priorities position the station as an advocate for social development and accountability, consistent with its public service role, most of these topics, as previously mentioned, are influenced by government policy documents such as IDPs rather than community-generated concerns. Thus, community members who this station is for are not involved in the decision-making of these issues. This reveals a subtle but important paradox: while Kurara FM advocates for development, it does so within the boundaries of state-defined discourse, limiting its capacity to serve as an independent voice for marginalised citizens.

Many examples were shared where the station reported calling in the municipality in response to community complaints about poor service delivery. In one notable case, even the MEC of Health was invited to account and launched a campaign in Wrenchville. The station also mentioned that community members often approach them directly. However, a key issue is that if the concerns raised do not qualify as newsworthy, the station is unlikely to cover them. This is largely due to its structured programming, which makes it more effective as a media advocate through its news department.

Several participants expressed limited awareness of their ability to use the station as a platform to articulate local challenges. For most listeners, the station primarily serves to deliver news, inform, and educate. When they do participate, it is usually through phone calls during existing programs, where they comment on the topic of the day, a form of reactive engagement rather than active co-production of content. Unfortunately, individuals from remote areas face access challenges as some can only tune in via their cars, while others listen regularly but lack the means to actively participate. As one community member suggested,

It seems Kurara FM is connected with the mines operating within the area. Like they have some kind of partnership, so we were thinking if they can, they can try to balance the equation of development to the far areas. They can also do some outreach as the radio station to those communities that are a bit far from here so that the community can also participate directly, more especially in their needs for development (Mokalanyane Interview, June 2025).

In line with Otto's (2011) critique of instrumentalist communication approaches, Kurara FM's development agenda demonstrates the tension between *communicative empowerment* and *managerial control*, reinforcing the paradox of participation discussed further below. Nonetheless, the station's mobilisation efforts such as organising a crime imbizo in Wrenchville demonstrate its potential as a development catalyst. As with any other communities in the country, John Taolo Gaetsewe experiences high cases of crime. According to the station, crime also forms part on its agenda, particularly crime prevention. As one participant shared, Kurara

FM played a big role in mobilising people for the crime imbizo where ministers and departments were present.

The station was previously successful in mobilising people for the crime imbizo that were held in Wrenchville. Where the minister and different sector departments were there. Kurara played a big role in mobilising the community to attend the crime imbizo (Mpho Interview, June 2025).

Such examples affirm the station's role in raising awareness and facilitating engagement, albeit in a manner concentrated around urban centres. Crime broadcasts are crucial as they encourage community members to take actions against these acts (Ngugi, 2015:2). While Kurara FM disseminates relevant developmental content, its practices remain primarily top-down, thus negating what Otto and Fourie (2016) describes as ethical or empowered participation. Here, participatory communication must move beyond dissemination toward dialogue and mutual learning, where communities co-construct meaning and agency, being "free to raise their concerns on a particular development situation or topic and likewise are free to challenge one another's utterances and assumptions about the mentioned issues or contexts" (Otto & Fourie, 2016).

5.4. Authority, communitarianism, and hierarchical reproduction

From the above discussions, it is evident that Kurara FM to a greater extent is not influenced by its community. Kurara FM, as a community radio station is expected to draw its powers from the community, thus reinforcing the bottom-up approach. Yet, the findings suggest that Kurara FM's operations are largely management-driven, with limited input from the broader community in decision-making processes.

The operational approach of Kurara FM reflects what Gaynor and O'Brien (2011) critiques as a deviation from authentic community service. The station positions itself as a service to the community, rather than functioning as a platform that enables community members to express themselves. Gaynor and O'Brien (2011) identify this as a poor practice - where the station operates *of* the community, rather than *for* the community. In addition, during an interview, the station's programme manager indicated that "*Our community is being led by us*" (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025). This further supports the argument that its practices reflect a top-down governance culture inconsistent with participatory ideals. Instead of facilitating community engagement, Kurara FM tends to act on behalf of the community, thereby limiting genuine grassroots involvement. This shows that it suffers from voice inequality where the rhetoric of participation masks underlying managerial dominance. Kurara FM's governance structure,

where management “leads the community,” reflects this imbalance, where participation becomes a symbolic rather than substantive exercise.

Kurara FM’s operational model conceivably aligns with Gaynor and O’Brien’s (2011) critique of community radio stations that “serve” communities rather than enable them to speak for themselves. Such a stance reproduces hierarchical relationships in which authority resides within the station rather than being shared with the audience. In communitarian terms, this model privileges representation *about* the community over representation *by* the community, undermining collective agency.

Here, Kurara FM arguably embodies what Bosch (2013) calls “partial participation” where communities engage primarily as consumers or commentators, not as co-creators of media content or governance processes. This structure reflects the participation paradox: while the station positions itself as an inclusive, grassroots platform, its internal organisation and decision-making processes perpetuate the very hierarchies it aims to dismantle.

5.5. *The paradox of power*

Community radio stations are inherently participatory platforms of communication (Mtimde, 2024:12). As such, they are expected to not only provide content relevant to their communities but also create opportunities for community members to be actively involved in both programming and governance. Participation in this context goes beyond occasional contributions through running programmes. Participation should include involvement in programme design, decision-making processes, and station management (Bosch, 2013; Howley, 2010).

In line with the participatory development communication paradigm (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 1999; Dervin & Huesca, 1999), meaningful participation entails dialogue, shared ownership, and collective decision-making, not just symbolic inclusion. Similarly, ICASA regulations (as cited in Mtimde, 2024:13), require that community members are involved in the management of the station, programming decisions and that every year stations are required to submit annual proof of community at every general meeting.

However, the findings suggest that community participation at Kurara FM remains limited, and minimalist as described by Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021). According to the station CEO, community members only participate through social media.

Social media also helps, because when you get, whether good or negative, you know that this is the direction you need to take. But in most cases the board is responsible in ensuring that the community participate (Mmusi Interview, June 2025).

Although social media and digital tools can facilitate interaction (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019), they do not fully align with the deeper forms of participation envisioned in participatory theory. It is unarguable that true participation requires more than commenting on posts or making call-ins but requires active influence over programming and operational decisions. Social media use's effectiveness is also limited by uneven digital access and literacy in rural contexts such as Kuruman. This issue was emphasised in the interview with community members who mentioned that communities such as Van Zyl often struggle with network connectivity, limiting the effectiveness of using social media as a participation tool.

As one participant explained, the absence of reliable network infrastructure impedes engagement, making such platforms inaccessible to many. When asked specifically about the role of the community members in decision-making processes of the station, Kurara FM's Programme Manager offered the following clarification:

The only role they play is to elect the board. In terms of the operations, that is solely resting with management (Khonkhobe Interview, June 2025).

This statement illustrates a top-down governance model, in which the community's influence ends at the point of board elections. Decision-making regarding programming, operations, and strategic direction is reserved for the station's internal leadership. This approach, while perhaps administratively efficient, is incongruent with the ideals of community ownership and participatory governance that underpin community radio (Bosch, 2014; Howley, 2010; Mtimde, 2024). While literature is clear on this point that community radio should be by the community, for the community, this clearly is not entirely the case with Kurara FM where members are only responsible for electing the board and the station's decisions are made by the station. This takes away power from those whom the station is for. Bosch (2013:429) argues that all members especially marginalised groups should have the opportunity to contribute to governance and policy-setting, ensuring that stations remain accountable to their local constituencies. This implies that Kurara FM does things the wrong way, as it continues to marginalise communities and run the station itself. Bamigboye and Osunkunle (2021) describes how Kurara FM perceive participation as minimalist participation. As community members participate only through social media and calls-ins. According to Mtimde (2024:14) community participation is important for the sustainability of the radio station, thus Kurara FM needs to ensure that not only do its community passively participate in its programming but also participate actively in its operations. Mtimde (2024) notes that ICASA regulations require community members to participate in programming, management, and governance, not merely serve as voters.

Thus, the model described by Kurara FM's Programme Manager represents a deviation from these participatory ideals. This model risks reinforcing hierarchical dynamics - contrary to the principles of media advocacy theory, which calls for the redistribution of communicative power so that community members can shape public discourse and advocate for the issues that matter to them (Wallack, 1994). In its current form, Kurara FM's model of participation offers limited opportunities for community members to co-create content or co-determine the station's direction. As Mtimde (2024:14) argues, sustainable community radio stations require active and meaningful community participation, not only in content generation but also in operational leadership. Without such participation, stations risk becoming detached from the communities they are meant to serve.

5.6. The participation paradox

There seems to be compelling evidence to suggest that Kurara FM effectively disseminates locally news and information, particularly to communities near the station. The content it broadcasts appears to reflect the lived experiences of its residents and contributes meaningfully to civic education and social awareness. However, the definition of participation at Kurara FM remains narrowly confined to audience feedback during call-in shows or social media interactions, with minimal involvement in governance or programming decisions. The programming decisions are made internally by the station, excluding community members from the decision-making process. This limited view of participation has been widely critiqued by scholars, who argue that genuine community involvement should extend beyond reactive engagement to include active participation in the station's governance and operational processes. Drawing on Habermas' (1989) notion of the *public sphere*, true participation requires equitable access to communicative spaces where all citizens can engage freely in dialogue (Otto & Fourie, 2009; Otto & Fourie, 2016). However, Kurara FM's uneven coverage and selective inclusion of voices create what Habermas would describe as a distorted communication space where some communities are systematically excluded from public deliberation (Otto & Fourie, 2009:231). The lack of horizontal dialogue between the station and peripheral audiences undermines the democratic potential of community radio as a medium for participatory discourse.

Through its agenda-setting and advocacy roles, Kurara FM brings visibility to a range of critical issues including unemployment, economic and youth development, women's health, gender equality, crime, and service delivery. Yet, these agendas are institutionally framed and geographically concentrated, excluding peripheral communities from both access and influence. As a result, Kurara FM here functions rather as a mediator of development discourse rather than a facilitator of grassroots empowerment. The participation paradox, therefore, lies

in this duality: Kurara FM amplifies community issues but does not fully democratise the processes through which those issues are selected, framed, and addressed.

As scholars have observed, community radio in the global South frequently navigates a contradictory terrain between empowerment and dependency. Community radio in the Global South faces significant sustainability challenges that create tensions between empowerment goals and dependency realities. Costa (2012) demonstrates that donor-funded community radio projects often fail to survive when external funding ends, with top-down initiatives particularly vulnerable to collapse or mission drift. This sustainability crisis is further explored by Krüger (2022) who identifies five revenue models namely commercial, patronage, state, donor, and community, each creating distinct power dynamics and dependencies that particularly affect marginalised communities where alternatives are limited. Paula (2011) examines this tension in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, highlighting how community radio struggle with political power relationships while lacking viable institutional frameworks that threaten their sustainability as empowerment tools. Babu (2020) reveals a technological paradox in South Asia, where community radio's democratic ideals conflict with its dependence on monopolistic technology providers, creating hegemonic relationships that constrain the sector's growth and independence.

Kurara FM exemplifies these dynamics, mediating development discourse but within the constraints of institutional and structural power. Through its consistent coverage of service delivery issues, the station succeeds in raising public awareness and exerting pressure on relevant authorities to address these concerns. This has empowered certain community members to leverage the station's news department to amplify their voices. For instance, some residents have invited the station to attend service delivery meetings and report on grievances related to municipal services. Such actions indicate a level of trust in the station's ability to hold local government accountable.

Nevertheless, while it succeeds in raising awareness and promoting accountability, it does so within a top-down operational logic that limits authentic community ownership. Also, these advocacy efforts appear to benefit only communities located near the station, thereby marginalising those in more remote areas. Although the station sets the agenda on issues without direct community input, it continues to disseminate locally relevant information, content that adds value to residents' lives and has the potential to drive social change.

Kurara FM demonstrates the dynamics of community radio, where instead of the station being by the community, it operates for the community. It is commonly agreed that genuine community radio requires authentic community control to maintain its transformative potential. When stations operate under external oversight rather than true community ownership, they

risk becoming extensions of larger broadcasting corporations rather than authentic community voices (Mhlanga, 2009). The participatory nature of community radio, while sometimes creating conflicts during egalitarian decision-making, ultimately facilitates both community and personal transformation by enabling counter-hegemonic perspectives and supporting communicative democracy (Moylan, 2019). Kurara FM's model, however, positions the station as the community's spokesperson rather than its platform reinforcing the paradox of participation and power central to this study. The station itself informs the community instead of adopting bottom-up models, deciding on behalf of its community and subjecting them to passive participation. In Habermasian terms, this reflects a *partial public sphere*, one that facilitates discussion but within constrained communicative structures that privilege managerial voices over grassroots dialogue. However, be it as it may, it appears that the station successfully disseminates locally relevant information and serves as a platform for advocacy on important issues such as service delivery. The most important factor the station needs to pay attention to, however, is participation - to allow community members to sort of run the station, thereby involving them in the station's governance and programming decisions.

It can be argued that the station marginalises communities distant from it. The station thus needs to relook its inclusive and participatory models. Nevertheless, the station's role in raising awareness and fostering accountability shows its capacity to contribute to social change. Addressing these contradictions will be vital if the station is to realise its potential as a truly participatory, community-driven medium for social change.

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the key findings of the study collected from both the station and community members, offering a view of the station's operations. The findings provide insights into how the station functions and how it applies participatory principles. The analysis revealed both the transformative potential and the structural limitations of community radio as a vehicle for grassroots empowerment. The chapter demonstrates that Kurara FM contributes significantly to local development through information dissemination, awareness raising, and advocacy. However, its practices only partially align with grassroots-driven participatory ideals. The data suggest that while the station has created meaningful spaces for engagement, these spaces remain unevenly accessible and structurally mediated by institutional and geographical boundaries. These insights lay the foundation for recommendations and conclusions presented in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1. Introduction

This final chapter consolidates the key insights from preceding chapters and provides conclusions and recommendations for further research. The purpose of this study was to investigate how community radio operates as a catalyst for social change, using Kurara FM as a case study. Hence its title – *Community radio and social change in South Africa: How Kurara FM facilitates local development initiatives in Kuruman, Northern Cape*. This chapter provides the conclusions of the study and presents the recommendations for further study.

6.2. Summary of the dissertation

Kurara FM is a community radio station based in Kuruman, in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District (JTG) of the Northern Cape Province. Established on 1 January 2012, it covers the district and parts of neighbouring areas such as Frances Baard and the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District in the North West. The station positions itself as a grassroots voice for the people of JTG, seeking to promote accountability and public participation while raising awareness about critical social issues through content that informs, educates and inspires. The premise of this study was that community radio, including Kurara FM, can serve as a platform through which community members raise public awareness and advocate for policy changes that address their concerns, in line with Media Advocacy Theory (Wallack, 1994) and participatory development communication (Servaes, 1999; Mefalopulos, 2008). At the same time, the study questioned whether Kurara FM genuinely embodies a bottom-up communication model in a historically fragmented and marginalised context, or whether funding dependencies, regulatory frameworks and commercial pressures risk reproducing top-down dynamics.

Guided by Media Advocacy Theory and participatory development communication, and informed by elements of development media theory and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McQuail, 2010; Melkote & Steeves, 2015), the study explored the following four research questions:

- a. how Kurara FM employs strategies of information dissemination and participatory engagement to foster social change in Kuruman;
- b. in what ways it enables marginalised communities to participate in content creation;
- c. how community members perceive its role in empowering local voices; and
- d. the extent to which its practices align with grassroots-driven approaches as opposed to reproducing hierarchical dynamics.

A qualitative instrumental case study design (Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was adopted, drawing on in-depth interviews with station personnel and semi-structured interviews with community participants, including community leaders and representatives of community-based organisations. Thirteen participants took part in the study seven from the community and six from the station providing rich, contextually embedded insights into how Kurara FM operates at the intersection of community, state and market.

The dissertation was structured into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study, outlined the research problem and research questions, and motivated the significance of examining Kurara FM as a case of community radio and social change in a rural, historically marginalised district. Chapter 2 reviewed literature on the historical development of community radio in South Africa, its policy environment, key features and roles in advocacy, empowerment and social change, with particular attention to participation, power and the inclusion of marginalised groups. Chapter 3 presented the theoretical framework, showing how participatory development communication and Media Advocacy Theory, supplemented by development media theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, offer a layered lens for analysing Kurara FM's dual role as a participatory platform and an advocacy-oriented broadcaster situated within broader media–state–society relations. Chapter 4 outlined the methodology, explaining and justifying the case study design, sampling strategy, data collection and analysis procedures, measures to ensure quality, and ethical considerations. Chapter 5 presented the empirical findings, organised around the four research questions, and traced how Kurara FM disseminates information, facilitates (and limits) participation, is perceived by community members, and navigates the tension between bottom-up ideals and top-down influence. This final chapter consolidates those insights into an integrated set of conclusions and points to implications for practice and further research.

6.3. Conclusions of the findings

With regard to the first research question, the study found that Kurara FM has developed structured mechanisms of information dissemination that strongly align with Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Coleman *et al.*, 2009). Topic-specific programmes deal with issues such as gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse, crime and local service delivery. These themes mirror provincial policy priorities, particularly in light of JTG's high rates of social problems, and show that the station operates as a node in a wider development communication architecture. Kurara FM also disseminates timely information on urgent local issues, such as crime and the shootings that occurred in Kuruman around May–June 2025, demonstrating its responsiveness and its capacity to

provide localised, real-time news that national outlets would be unlikely to cover. From a media advocacy perspective, this responsiveness indicates that the station does not merely inform but can also frame certain issues as urgent public concerns, thereby contributing to agenda-setting and potential mobilisation (Wallack *et al.*, 1993; Gibson, 2010; Fayoyin, 2014).

The station's multilingual programming in Setswana, Afrikaans and English emerged as a key mechanism for enhancing accessibility, cultural inclusion and the sense of belonging among listeners (Bosch, 2013; Howley, 2005). Broadcasting in local languages makes content more intelligible to diverse audiences and facilitates active participation through call-ins, SMS and social media interactions. In line with development media and participatory communication principles, the station's commitment to local languages and cultural programming—such as traditional music, interviews with cultural groups and coverage of local events—also contributes to cultural preservation and symbolic recognition (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Milan, 2009). These practices support the conclusion that Kurara FM plays an important role in information dissemination, cultural affirmation and local identity formation.

The findings also show that Kurara FM makes notable contributions to youth development. The station dedicates airtime to youth-focused issues and actively creates platforms for young and emerging artists to showcase their talents, increasing their visibility and prospects for bookings at local ceremonies and events. This reflects both the participatory ethos of community radio and the media advocacy impulse to use media platforms to expand opportunities for marginalised groups—in this case, rural youth (Backhaus, 2020; Bulani *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, programming aimed at women's health and financial literacy underscores the station's role in supporting women's empowerment, echoing broader development communication commitments to gender-sensitive communication (Oduaran & Nelson, 2019; Waisbord, 2014).

However, the second and fourth research questions reveal important limits and contradictions in Kurara FM's participatory practice. Although community members participate through call-ins, social media engagement and, to a lesser extent, co-production of news content, the study found that topic selection and programme design are largely predetermined by station management and shaped by external frameworks such as the district and local Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and government policies. As one staff member explained, programming decisions are guided by the issues prioritised in the IDPs such as housing, water, crime and infrastructure and by provincial campaigns around GBVF, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. While this IDP-driven model strengthens the station's alignment with official development agendas and enables it to function as a partner in policy communication (South

African Government, 2014; Mtimde, 2024), it simultaneously narrows the scope for grassroots topic generation and bottom-up agenda-setting.

In addition, the findings indicate that Kurara FM's most participatory practices are concentrated in the news division, where community members visit or contact the station to share concerns and stories that are then followed up by journalists. This co-content development at the level of news reporting enhances the station's watchdog function and its role in facilitating accountability, particularly in relation to local government. Community members frequently use the station to call on the municipality and other authorities to respond to service delivery failures or other pressing concerns, consistent with Media Advocacy Theory's emphasis on using media to challenge power holders and address structural conditions (Wallack, 1994; Waisbord, 2020). Yet beyond the news department, the broader programming grid is largely designed internally, and community members do not have a meaningful role in programme planning, governance or strategic decision-making.

This leads to a central conclusion of the study: participation at Kurara FM is primarily interpreted as reactive audience engagement—calling in, commenting on social media or contributing occasional news tips rather than as shared ownership of the station's communicative agenda. Community members are positioned more as listeners who respond to pre-set topics than as co-producers who decide what should be discussed and how. Scholars of community radio and participatory communication have long cautioned against such narrow definitions of participation, arguing instead for deeper involvement in governance, policy formulation and programming structures (Servaes, 1999; Dahl, 2013; Mhagama, 2016; Conrad, 2014). In terms of the meta-theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter 3 (Dervin & Huesca, 1999; Lubombo, 2012), it can be argued that authority at Kurara FM continues to flow from management, funders and policy frameworks rather than from the grassroots, and that the station often reproduces a top-down model in which communities are consulted but not empowered to define the communicative and development agenda.

The third research question, which focused on community perceptions, revealed a nuanced view of Kurara FM's role. On the one hand, community participants consistently described the station as a trusted and valued platform for local news, information, and public discussion. They emphasised that the station reflects the lived experiences of Kuruman residents, keeps them informed about crime, local events and development projects, and offers a crucial space for "calling out" local authorities when they are perceived as failing in their responsibilities. On the other hand, many listeners also felt that the station's content increasingly resembles that of a commercial broadcaster, with a strong emphasis on local advertising and business promotion. Several respondents primarily associated Kurara FM with "local news and adverts",

suggesting that the imperatives of financial sustainability are beginning to shape its programming priorities in ways that can overshadow its developmental mandate (Olorunnisola *et al.*, 2020; Tyali, 2021).

This commercial drift is intertwined with a second structural constraint: uneven technical coverage across the district. Participants from remote settlements such as Heuningvlei, Gasehunelo and Van Zyl reported that they struggled to receive the station's signal, or could only listen in vehicles equipped with radios. As a result, they felt excluded from the station's communicative space and from the broader development conversation. From a participatory development perspective, this uneven reach undermines the claim that Kurara FM is "for the community, by the community", as entire villages fall outside its practical sphere of inclusion (Myers, 2011; Nassanga, 2009). It also confirms that access, as a core tenet of community radio (Bosch, 2013; Howley, 2010), is not merely about institutional openness but also about the infrastructural capacity to reach dispersed rural populations.

In light of these findings, the fourth research question on whether Kurara FM embodies bottom-up approaches or replicates top-down dynamics can be answered only in qualified terms. Kurara FM clearly fulfils several important development and advocacy functions. It disseminates locally relevant information, amplifies community concerns, facilitates dialogue between citizens and authorities, supports youth and women's empowerment, and preserves local languages and cultures. Its structured, issue-based programming and responsiveness to community-raised concerns align with the principles of Media Advocacy Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, demonstrating how community radio can shape local public agendas and contribute to social change. At the same time, the station's reliance on IDPs and government campaigns for topic selection, its management-driven planning processes, its limited opportunities for community participation in governance and programme design, its uneven signal, and its growing commercial orientation all point to the persistence of hierarchical dynamics and structural constraints.

The problem, therefore, is not simply that Kurara FM depends on external funding or engages advertisers; such realities are common in the community media sector and often unavoidable. Rather, the challenge lies in how the station manages these dependencies. Currently, it tends to operate "on behalf of" the community rather than "with" the community. Decisions about what is broadcast, which programmes are prioritised and how resources are allocated are made largely within the station, albeit with reference to policy frameworks. This removes decision-making power from those the station is meant to serve and risks undermining the participatory ethos that legitimises community radio. In short, Kurara FM occupies an ambivalent position: it is an indispensable platform for local information and advocacy, yet it

does not fully realise the democratic potential of community radio as envisaged in participatory communication theory.

The conclusions of this study can be summarised as follows. First, Kurara FM plays a significant role in information dissemination, cultural affirmation and local agenda-setting in Kuruman and parts of the JTG district. Second, it contributes meaningfully to social change through youth and women's empowerment, watchdog functions and facilitation of public dialogue on key social issues such as GBVF, crime and health. Third, its model of participation remains largely limited to reactive audience engagement, with insufficient community involvement in governance and programme design. Fourth, technical limitations in broadcast coverage and an increasing commercial orientation further constrain the station's ability to function as a fully inclusive and bottom-up development medium. Lastly, these dynamics illustrate the broader tension within community radio between participatory ideals and the structural realities of policy-driven, resource-dependent and market-pressured media environments.

6.4. Limitations of the study

While the delimitations outlined in Chapter One were deliberately set to enable a focused and coherent investigation, the study also has limitations that qualify the scope and transferability of its findings. However, these limitations do not invalidate the study but provide important context for interpreting its claims.

A first limitation relates to the single-case design. By concentrating on Kurara FM as an instrumental case of community radio in a rural, historically marginalised context, the study provides depth but sacrifices breadth. As Yin (2018) notes, case studies are well suited to answering how and why questions in complex settings, but they do not support statistical generalisation to a wider population of stations or regions. The insights generated here therefore speak primarily to Kurara FM and comparable contexts and are best understood as analytical rather than statistical generalisations. Readers should be cautious about extending the findings to all community radio stations in South Africa without considering differences in history, governance, funding and audience profiles (Yin 2018).

A second limitation concerns the sample and data sources. The study relies on semi-structured interviews with purposely selected station staff, community leaders, representatives of community-based organisations. While this strategy is appropriate for qualitative research that seeks information-rich cases rather than representativeness (Merriam & Tisdell 2016), it however means that many listener perspectives, especially those of less-organised or harder-to-reach groups, are not directly captured. Time and resource

constraints precluded a large-scale audience survey or extensive ethnographic observation of everyday listening practices. As a result, the analysis of community perceptions is necessarily partial and mediated through those individuals who agreed and were able to participate.

Third, the study's temporal focus is limited. Although the station's history since its establishment in 2012 is referenced through documents and participants' recollections, the empirical work is concentrated on Kurara FM's contemporary practices at the time of fieldwork. This aligns with the study's primary interest in current dynamics rather than historical reconstruction, but it means that shifts over time, for example changes in programming, management, funding or political relationships are not systematically traced. Participant recollections of earlier periods may also be affected by recall bias, selective memory and present concerns (Maxwell 2013).

As with most qualitative work, the study is shaped by researcher positionality and access. The researcher's disciplinary background, language competencies and prior understandings of community radio and development inevitably influenced the questions asked, the relationships established with participants and the interpretation of data (Tracy 2010; Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Although reflexive attention was paid to these issues, and efforts were made to check emerging interpretations against the data, some perspectives particularly those of very marginalised listeners who may be less confident in formal interview settings may not have been fully captured. Access to certain internal documents or meetings was also limited, which constrains the depth of analysis regarding organisational decision-making within Kurara FM.

Another limitation is the theoretical framing of the study. While deliberate and coherent, the framework is itself limiting. By foregrounding participatory development communication and Media Advocacy Theory, supplemented by Development Media Theory and Agenda-setting, the analysis privileges particular questions about participation, power and issue-framing (Servaes 2008; Wallack *et al.* 1993; McQuail 2010; McCombs 2004). Other potentially relevant lenses, for example, feminist media theory, critical political economy or decolonial perspectives are not systematically applied, even though they have been productively used in community radio research and could have illuminated additional dimensions of Kurara FM's operation. Feminist media scholarship on community radio has shown how ostensibly participatory spaces remain structured by gendered power relations that shape who gains access to production roles, whose stories are told on air and how voice is differentially valued, even within progressive, community-based projects (O'Brien, 2019; Dahal, 2013). In the same vein, critical political economy studies of South African and African community radio

demonstrate how ownership patterns, donor and state funding regimes, and regulatory frameworks constrain editorial autonomy and may narrow the scope for genuinely bottom-up participation and advocacy (Tyali, 2017; 2021; Tomaselli & Dunn, 2001). A growing body of decolonial work further highlights the ways in which community media can both contest and remain entangled in the colonial matrix of power, particularly in relation to race, indigeneity, language and knowledge hierarchies (Jackson, 2013; Chiumbu & Radebe, 2020). While these perspectives inform the broader critical orientation of the study, they are not developed as full analytic frames in this study. Future research could explicitly mobilise them to deepen analysis of gendered labour within the station, structural funding constraints and the colonial histories that continue to shape communicative power in Kuruman.

Finally, there are contextual and practical constraints linked to the broader environment in which Kurara FM operates. The Northern Cape's geographical vastness, infrastructural challenges and linguistic diversity make it difficult to access all segments of the audience within the timeframe of a Master's project. Scheduling interviews with busy station personnel and community leaders also required compromises in terms of who was available and when, which may have favoured more visible or formally positioned actors. These pragmatic factors necessarily shaped the empirical material on which the analysis rests.

Taken together, these limitations underscore that the study offers an in-depth, situated account of how one community radio station contributes to social change and local development initiatives in Kuruman, rather than a comprehensive or definitive description of community radio in South Africa. Recognising these constraints is consistent with qualitative standards of rigour, which emphasise transparency about the conditions under which knowledge is produced and encourage readers to judge the applicability of findings to other settings based on the richness of contextual detail and the plausibility of the analytical claims (Tracy 2010; Yin 2018).

6.5. Recommendations for further research

This study has shown that Kurara FM plays a significant role in addressing locally relevant issues in Kuruman, yet it has also highlighted important questions about whose voices shape the station's agenda, how governance structures operate, and how technical and spatial constraints affect participation. These insights suggest several directions for further research.

Future studies could examine community agenda-setting and issue prioritisation in greater depth. While this study indicates that Kurara FM engages with development concerns appropriate to its locale, it remains unclear to what extent programme topics are driven by

community-defined priorities versus those of station staff, funders or external actors. Building on participatory communication and agenda-setting theory (Servaes 2008; McCombs 2004), subsequent research could explore participatory mechanisms such as listener forums, participatory content planning or community assemblies through which residents might systematically influence the station's editorial agenda. Comparative case studies across multiple community stations could reveal different models of participatory agenda-setting and their implications for voice, accountability and local democracy.

The findings also suggest the need for further research on governance, representation and power within community radio, particularly in rural and historically marginalised contexts. The tension between a view of the station as leading the community and the normative principle that community radio should derive its authority from the community rather than speak for it is not unique to Kurara FM; it resonates with wider debates in community media scholarship about ownership, participation and control (Bosch 2014; Howley 2010). Future research could therefore investigate how governance structures such as boards, management committees, volunteer bodies are constituted; who participates in them (in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, age and geography); and how decisions about programming, resource allocation and partnerships are made. Methodologically, ethnographic and participatory action research designs would be well suited to unpacking everyday governance practices and the informal power relations that shape them.

This study underscores the importance of spatial and technical dimensions of inclusion, particularly in a geographically vast and unevenly connected district such as John Taolo Gaetsewe. Further research could investigate how signal reach, infrastructure and digital convergence (for example, streaming, WhatsApp groups, social media) mediate access to and participation in community radio (Bosch 2013; Mtimde 2024). This might include mapping reception quality across villages, examining how listeners in remote areas improvise listening and feedback practices, and exploring whether digital platforms mitigate or reproduce existing exclusions. A mixed-methods design that combines technical mapping with qualitative audience research would deepen understanding of how geography and infrastructure shape communicative citizenship.

Future studies could also explicitly mobilise alternative critical lenses that this study only flagged as absent, such as feminist media theory, critical political economy and decolonial perspectives. Feminist work on community radio has shown how gendered divisions of labour and norms around leadership and authority affect which women can participate and on what terms (O'Brien 2019; Dahal 2013). Critical political economy analyses have highlighted how funding regimes, donor dependence and state advertising can compromise editorial

autonomy and reshape the priorities of community stations (Tyali 2017; Chiumbu & Radebe 2020). Decolonial approaches remind us that community radio in South Africa operates within long histories of racialised dispossession and linguistic hierarchy. Future research that explicitly applies these perspectives to Kurara FM or similar stations could yield richer insights into how gender, class, race and indigeneity structure participation, labour conditions and the distribution of communicative power.

Finally, there is scope for longitudinal and comparative research that tracks community radio's contribution to social change over time. This study focused on Kurara FM's practices and community perceptions during a specific period; however, the dynamics of participation, advocacy and station–state relations are likely to evolve as political, economic and technological conditions shift. Longitudinal work revisiting Kurara FM or pairing it with other stations in different provinces could explore how community radio's role in local development changes across electoral cycles, funding shifts or regulatory reform. Such designs would deepen theoretical understandings of community radio as a dynamic, contested institution rather than a static “intervention”.

Taken together, these directions point to the need for a broader research agenda that moves beyond viewing community radio primarily as a channel for information dissemination, towards understanding it as a complex institutional site where participation, power, identity and development are continuously negotiated.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GATEKEEPER LETTER

Reitumetse Mooki
School of Communication
Faculty of Humanities
North-West University
Mahikeng Campus
reitumetsemooki@gmail.com
0618343563

Kurara FM Manager

Good day, my name is Reitumetse Mooki, a research student from the North-West university, researching about the role of community radio in local community development.

There is consensus in development communication that community radio is a tool for community development. Because of this role, my study aims to investigate the role of Kurara FM on local development, this is because the extent of Kurara FM's contribution to broader community development initiatives is unknown.

To make this study a success, I seek permission to conduct research on Kurara FM. I would like to request to an interview with you and any other station's worker(s) about this role.

This is an academic research, your participation will be a contribution towards my academics.

Your positive response in this regard will highly be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Reitumetse Mooki.

NWU Master of Communication candidate.

APPENDIX B1: INTERVIEW GUIDE: Kurara FM personnel

Community Radio and Social Change in South Africa: How Kurara FM Facilitates Local Development Initiatives in Kuruman, Northern Cape.

Introduction

As you are now aware, this study explores the role of Kurara FM in fostering local community development initiatives in Kuruman. You have been selected to participate in the study because you have been deemed knowledgeable about how Kurara FM facilitates social change within this community.

- Do you mind starting by introducing yourself concerning your role within the Kuruman community?
- 1. Examine the mechanisms through which Kurara FM fosters social change in Kuruman**
 - In what ways do you think Kurara FM fosters social change within the local community?
 - What local issues or challenges does Kurara FM focus on through its programming?
 - How are community members involved in the discussions around social change?
 - 2. Evaluate how Kurara FM enables marginalised communities.**
 - How does Kurara FM involve the local community in its programming decisions?
 - Can you share examples of how Kurara FM has empowered specific groups or individuals in Kuruman?
 - How do you measure the impact of the station on community empowerment?
 - What strategies does Kurara FM employ to encourage active participation from marginalised groups?
 - 3. Assess whether Kurara FM's practices align with grassroots-driven approaches or reproduce hierarchal dynamics.**
 - How does Kurara FM facilitate community engagement?
 - In what ways are community members involved in the decision-making of the station?

- How does Kurara FM decide on what issues to cover or broadcast?

Closing

- Do you have any additional thoughts on how Kurara FM could enhance its role in promoting social change in Kuruman?
- Thank you for your time and valuable insights. I will review this interview in detail, and if I need further clarity, I may reach out to you again. I will also provide you with a summary of the interview for your review and any additional input you may have.

APPENDIX B2: INTERVIEW GUIDE: COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Community Radio and Social Change in South Africa: How Kurara FM Facilitates Local Development Initiatives in Kuruman, Northern Cape

Introduction

As you are now aware, this study explores the role of Kurara FM in fostering local community development initiatives in Kuruman. You have been selected to participate in the study because you have been deemed knowledgeable about how Kurara FM facilitates social change within this community.

- Do you mind starting by introducing yourself concerning your role within the Kuruman community?

1. Perceptions of Kurara FM's role in the community

- How do you perceive the role of Kurara FM in promoting social change in Kuruman?
- Can you share specific examples of how Kurara FM has contributed to development initiatives in the community?
- How accessible and responsive do you find Kurara FM to community concerns?

2. Community empowerment through Kurara FM

- In your view, how has Kurara FM empowered individuals or groups in the community?
- Do you feel that the station provides a platform for diverse voices, including marginalised or underrepresented groups?
- How do you think Kurara FM could further contribute to community empowerment?

3. Engagement with development issues

- How does Kurara FM help to inform and engage the community around local development initiatives?
- Can you describe a specific instance where Kurara FM has played a role in mobilising the community for social or developmental causes?
- What role do you see Kurara FM playing in the future regarding community empowerment and social change?

Closing

- Do you have any additional thoughts on how Kurara FM could enhance its role in promoting social change in Kuruman?
- Thank you for your time and valuable insights. I will review this interview in detail, and if I need further clarity, I may reach out to you again. I will also provide you with a summary of the interview for your review and any additional input you may have.

APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics
Committee (BaSSREC)

Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,
Training and Support
Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics

Tel: 018 103 4448
Email: Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

06 June 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 04/06/2025, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Community radio and social change in South Africa: How Kurara FM facilitates local development initiatives in Kuruman, Northern Cape.																															
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr. M. Lubombo																															
Student/Research Team: R.G. Mooki (31371612)																															
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Institution			Study Number					Year		Status																					
Application Type: Single study																															
Commencement date: 04/06/2025	Risk: <table border="1"><tr><td>Low</td></tr></table>	Low																													
Low																															
Expiry date: 04/06/2026																															
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																															

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

<p>General conditions:</p> <p><i>While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and</i>- <i>without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.</i>
