Global Grants 2025 - Individual Grantee Reports

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Position: Head of Digital Platforms

Organisation: Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC)

Activity: Operations and Strategies

Location: South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)

Date: 14 April - 24 April 2025

Mark at SABC News Desk. Credit: Mark Agodoa

Objectives

The main objectives of this visit were:

- To gain insights into SABC's digital broadcasting strategies and content distribution
- To explore potential areas for collaboration with SABC
- To understand the operations of the corporation as well as challenges related to funding and TV licensing

Experience

Digital Content Strategy:
In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, it is imperative for media corporations to adopt forward-thinking digital strategies to remain relevant. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has embraced this digital transformation by integrating a multifaceted approach to content dissemination. One of the core elements of their strategy is the use of over-the-top (OTT) platforms. Unlike many corporations that rely primarily on well-known social media platforms, SABC has developed its own proprietary streaming platform, SABC+, which allows for content ownership and greater control over distribution. In addition to OTT services, SABC actively uses traditional social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to further expand its viewership and engage with diverse audiences. A noteworthy aspect of their content approach is multilingual broadcasting; SABC broadcasts in all 12 official South African languages, including South African Sign Language. This

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commitment to linguistic diversity ensures accessibility and inclusivity, fostering national unity and supporting their public service mandate.

Community Engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:
SABC's role as a public service broadcaster extends beyond media production into meaningful community engagement and corporate social responsibility. One of the major areas of impact is their support for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). SABC allocates valuable airtime to NGOs that focus on pressing societal issues, thereby amplifying social causes and reinforcing their mandate to inform and educate the public. Additionally, the corporation runs targeted campaigns, such as back-to-school initiatives that provide resources to underprivileged schools. These efforts underscore SABC's commitment to education, youth development, and the upliftment of marginalised communities.

TV Licensing System Challenges:
A comprehensive discussion on the current state of TV licence collection between SABC and the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) revealed shared challenges and insights. One of the primary concerns is the low compliance rate, as a significant number of consumers fail to obtain a TV licence. This widespread non-compliance has resulted in substantial revenue shortfalls, hampering the operational capacity of public broadcasters. These challenges have been exacerbated by the broader economic difficulties brought on by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which further reduced consumers' ability to pay licensing fees. In response, SABC has proposed several innovative reforms to the licensing system. Chief among these is the conversion from a traditional licensing model to a levy system, where a fee is automatically included in the sale of televisions and related devices. This would simplify the process, improve compliance, and generate reliable revenue. SABC suggests that funds raised through this mechanism should be allocated directly to the broadcaster, reducing their dependency on often inadequate government funding.

Production and Technology Utilisation:
During a visit to the production of the TKO show, I observed first-hand SABC's impressive technological capabilities and commitment to high-quality broadcasting. Their Outside Broadcasting (OB) units are equipped with modern OB vans that support live production and on-site event coverage, highlighting their investment in state-of-the-art infrastructure. Furthermore, SABC's internal culture encourages cross-departmental collaboration, fostering a creative environment where innovation thrives. This collaborative approach enhances both production quality and operational efficiency, reinforcing SABC's reputation as a forward-looking public broadcaster.

Take aways for GBC: Based on the insights gathered from the visit to SABC, there are some strategies that can be adopted by GBC.

1. Explore Collaborative Projects with SABC: Initiating dialogues to explore partnerships for shared projects focusing on content creation and technology-sharing can improve our operational capabilities.
2. Enhance Digital Engagement Strategies: Implementing successful strategies from SABC concerning digital outreach and audience engagement will help GBC connect with viewers more effectively.
3. Evaluate TV Licensing Strategies: Considering the shift to a levy system, similar to SABC's proposal, could streamline GBC's revenue generation processes and improve compliance rates.
4. Develop Community Engagement Initiatives: Structuring CSR programs to mirror SABC's initiatives will allow GBC to strengthen ties with the community and promote social development.
5. Invest in Technology and Training: Enhancing production technology and fostering an environment of learning and internal collaboration will aid in retaining talent and improving output quality.

Mark at SABC Henley Television Facilities. Credit: Mark Agodoa

Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - The Role of SABC: As part of its commitment to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has implemented a number of strategic initiatives that align with key global development targets. SDG 4 – Quality Education: SABC, as a national broadcaster, plays a pivotal role in promoting quality Education in fulfilment of SDG 4. In achieving this SABC has dedicated a DTT channel called 'SABC Education' solely for education, where lessons for various levels are taught. They also have a dedicated YouTube channel called 'SABC Education show' to cover various educational programmes and lessons to children of different ages.

SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: To foster innovation and modernise its infrastructure, SABC is investing in digital broadcasting. This includes the digitisation of archival video content previously stored on tapes, thereby preserving valuable historical content. The Corporation has also embraced over-the-top (OTT) platforms and actively utilises social media to extend its reach. These efforts are supported by the adoption of cutting-edge production technologies to enhance content delivery and viewer experience.

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: SABC actively supports inclusive access to information by embracing linguistic and cultural diversity. Through multilingual broadcasts; broadcasting in twelve (12) languages, inclusive programming, and the incorporation of sign language interpretation, SABC ensures that its content is accessible to a broad spectrum of South Africa's diverse population, an effort many media organisations overlook. They have also set aside some free airtime to support various NGO's working to achieve various SDGs.

The SABC's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals is evident in its multifaceted approach to education, innovation, and inclusion. By leveraging its platform as a national broadcaster, SABC not only informs and educates but also champions equality and technological advancement, contributing meaningfully to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Mark with SABC cameraman from The TKO Show. Credit: Mark Agodoa

Conclusion

The visit to SABC provided invaluable insights into operational strategies that can enhance GBC's offerings and address common challenges in public broadcasting. The proposals made by SABC regarding the licensing system and their approach to community engagement serve as critical learning points for us as we aim to improve our services and adapt to evolving audience needs. Ongoing dialogues and the implementation of these recommendations will significantly benefit GBC in its mission to deliver quality public service broadcasting.

During my discussion with the digital team, we both lamented monetisation as one of the key challenges facing us. We stream our various platforms hoping to make some revenue, but the monetisation regime implemented content on by tech platforms such as META and TikTok are not clear, and we are unable to fully understand how their monetisation really works. To add to that we are normally cited for violations such as copyright and community standards, and our platforms normally suffer unwarranted restrictions making it difficult to generate revenue and grow our numbers. I therefore recommend that PMA intervenes and possibly make a case on behalf of members to these tech platforms, so we earn revenue from our content.

I would like to thank PMA for this opportunity and look forward to discussing these findings further to enhance our initiatives at GBC.

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