FINAL REPORT

SANEF COMMUNITY MEDIA DIGITISATION DRIVE (BROADCASTERS AND PUBLISHERS)

SANEF — SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL EDITORS' FORUM
It's about South Africa.

20 24

Table of Contents

1. Abstract
2. Executive Summary
3. Introduction
4. Project Objectives
5. Scope of Work
6. Project Implementation
   - Phase 1: Pilot Phase
   - Phase 2: Full Rollout
7. Partner Profiles and Progress
   - Initial Status
   - Site Visits
   - Current Progress
   - Partner Highlights
8. Achievements
9. Impact Analysis
   - Beneficiary Feedback
   - Community Reach and Engagement
   - Economic Impact
10. Commercial Opportunities
11. Challenges and Solutions
12. Future Plans and Continued Services
13. Conclusion
14. Appendices

Abstract

The SANEF Digitisation Drive aims to strengthen community media organisations in South Africa by improving their digital presence and sustainability. This report details the project's transition from Social Weaver to MeD8 Media, highlighting objectives, implementation phases, and key achievements. By implementing a comprehensive digitisation strategy, 15 community media partners gained new tools and platforms, enhancing their content creation and distribution capabilities.

A key focus was to support independently owned community publishers and broadcasters in adapting to the shift from traditional media, such as printed newspapers and radio, to digital platforms where readers and listeners are now. This was achieved by providing equitable access to technology and training. The report also covers the challenges faced, the project's impact on community engagement and economic sustainability, and future plans for continued support.

Executive Summary

The SANEF Digitisation Drive aimed to support community media organisations by introducing and enhancing digital platforms for sustainability. It empowered 15 community publishers and broadcasters with digital tools, training, and platforms. Additionally, the project introduced the ongoing Community Media Support Services (CMSS) for other media companies not selected. This initiative bridged the digital divide, enabling these partners and CMSS subscribers to adapt to the shift from traditional to digital media, ensuring their continued relevance and economic sustainability in their communities.

Project Objectives

The project aimed to develop a digital community media sustainability strategy, implement individual newsroom digital sustainability plans, establish a central desk for enquiries and support, and manage a transparent selection process for beneficiaries. These objectives were designed to enhance the digital capabilities and sustainability of community media partners. The deliverables included developing digital assets like online news platforms, assisting with the establishment of social media accounts, creating digital rate cards for commercial sustainability, and providing an online digital resource and information platform. Additionally, the project offered motivation and assistance with marketing strategies. The scope of work encompassed several detailed tasks as per tender requirements issued out by SANEF on June 25, 2022, considering urban and rural diversity. This included developing a digital community media sustainability project, implementing plans for news gathering workflows, digital tools, and sales strategies. Furthermore, the project established and operated a central desk to enable all partners, including those not part of the drive, to benefit from the resources created by this initiative.

Scope of Work

The scope of work included several detailed tasks as per tender issued by SANEF on June 25, 2022 and its requirements. These tasks considered urban and rural diversity, developed a digital community media sustainability project, and implemented plans for news gathering workflows, digital tools and sales strategies. Additionally, the project established and operated a central desk for enabling all partners and those who are not part of the drive to benefit from the resources established by this initiative.

Develop digital workflows and tools for integration into traditional print and broadcast newsrooms, facilitating content publication across both traditional and online platforms to ensure future sustainability. Key components encompass essential elements like digital newsgathering and multimedia production workflows, a robust content management and web publication system akin to WordPress or its superior counterpart, and social media management strategies and tools. Additionally, include optional modules for streaming and podcasting services, catering to various platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok. Proposed websites should offer publishers and broadcasters opportunities to diversify revenue streams through subscription services, online ad revenue, e-commerce, or value-added offerings. Furthermore, ensure compatibility with third-party applications such as Pocket Reporter, aiding young reporters in crafting diverse story formats.

Manage a pilot initiative aimed at implementing customized versions of the online toolkit within an initial group of 15 community print and broadcast newsrooms, tailored to their individual infrastructure, requirements, and online opportunities. The project rollout within each newsroom should incorporate workshops to determine appropriate solutions specific to each environment, forming part of a sustainable future plan. This includes the setup of hardware and software, alongside comprehensive training on workflows and tools to empower self-sufficiency. Throughout this process, evaluation and fine-tune the proposed digital workflows and tools.

Establishment a central development and assistance desk dedicated to supporting the implementation and operation of digital production and online services in the selected newsrooms.

Develop criteria and a selection process to choose the initial group of community newsrooms for the pilot project, taking into account factors such as provincial representation, language diversity, urban/rural settings, and varying sizes and types of newsrooms.

Project Implementation

Phase 1: Pilot Phase : Overview

During the pilot phase, the initial budget was utilized to recruit and train the first three pilot phase beneficiaries. A WordPress Multisite platform was developed to support the digital needs of these partners. This phase also had to consider the usage of credible, robust, and secure domain registrars, hosting, and backup solutions. It incorporated an industry-recognized and proficient content management system (CMS) that is user-friendly and has adequate support and usage tutorials. Additionally, third-party tools were integrated to enhance the user experience of both publishers and the team responsible for producing and publishing content on the platforms. Furthermore, as part of the recruitment process and implementation of the Pilot Phase, the team documented the process, challenges, and input from the Pilot Partners. This was done through monthly feedback forms to ensure that once the full rollout kicks off, all questions, challenges, and project snags were ironed out to allow for scaling and onboarding the 12 second-phase partners.

Project planning and recruitment

A structured plan was devised to ensure transparency, credibility, and inclusivity in managing the selection process, involving panelists from AIP, SANEF representatives, and independent media consultants and experts. The plan considered various factors, including the recruitment process, interview logistics (whether virtual or physical), associated costs, and panel representative availability. A standardized questionnaire was developed to ensure fairness to all applicants. Interviews with shortlisted partners were recorded via video for panelists to review, along with a separate document for additional comments. Selection criteria encompassed the project's scope of work, such as provincial representation, language diversity, urban/rural settings, and newsroom sizes, with an emphasis on gender diversity and representation from across South Africa's provinces.

The initial three partners were chosen due to their limited to no digital presence and their unfamiliarity with online news publishing, referred to as "green" in this context. Their selection was based on their enthusiasm, willingness to engage, and one partner's transition to online publishing amid the challenges posed by COVID-19 on traditional print operations.

After being selected, the partners progressed to the second phase of the recruitment plan, which involved onboarding and gathering information to aid in the development of their new digital news platform. This process unfolded smoothly as the partners provided all relevant details, including company history for the "about us" pages, backdated content for accurate site population, rate cards, and publisher photos. The onboarding process also aimed to assess individuals' online knowledge, digital literacy, computer skills, and, at times, their business

acumen. Data collected from the onboarding form, facilitated through Google Forms, helped the team tailor workshop plans and address specific needs effectively.

Workshop

In addition to developing the WordPress Multisite platform and ensuring the technical infrastructure, the pilot phase also required the creation of a comprehensive workshop for the initial training and kick-off. The planning process for this workshop was meticulous, considering factors such as the varying levels of digital literacy among the selected partners, the specific training needed to align them with the digital drive, and selecting appropriate presenters to deliver the training effectively. Moreover, finding a central venue for the training was crucial to provide partners with a conducive environment for absorbing the workshop content, while also addressing travel arrangements to ensure their participation.

The plan for the workshop also incorporated data gathered from the onboarding process of the recruitment plan. Hosted in Midrand, this workshop aimed to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing and assess group dynamics between print and radio. It's important to note that by removing partners from their usual work environments, they were given an opportunity to "think outside the box." The Digitisation drive and workshop establishment were designed to facilitate cross-sharing of ideas, successes, and challenges, sparking collaboration among publishers and broadcasters.

Guides, manuals and platform for tutorials

To provide partners with practical and budget-friendly training aligned with the digitization drive, we launched the Community Media Support Services (CMSS) website (www.communitymss.co.za) instead of traditional printed manuals. This dynamic platform offers tutorials and resources, including step-by-step guides for troubleshooting technical issues and video tutorials on growing online audiences. Additionally, the CMSS platform incorporates media news updates from organizations like SANEF and AIP to keep partners informed about industry opportunities. It serves as a manual, guide, and motivator for all partners, including those who were not selected for the project.

Importantly, the CMSS platform is designed to be an ongoing business model for MeD8 Media, allowing for continuous updates and improvements to support partners as systems evolve. This ensures that partners have access to the latest tools and resources to thrive in the digital media landscape.

Planning for Communication, Coordination and Support

To ensure effective communication, coordination, and support during the Pilot phase, we devised a practical plan tailored to handle queries, troubleshoot technical issues, and notify partners about updates and new developments. Initially, we launched an easy-to-use WhatsApp number with an auto-reply feature. However, after a month of testing, we found this approach to be confusing.

As a more practical alternative, we established individual WhatsApp groups for each partner. These groups included at least three members of the MeD8 Media team and staff from each partner organization. This setup allowed us to efficiently address and manage all partner needs, fostering effective communication and collaboration throughout the project.

The successful partners' profiles and progress reports are available in this report under the sections labeled Partner Profile and Progress.

1. **North Coast Radio**: Established in 2003, North Coast Community Radio (104 FM) is a registered NPO broadcasting in the King Cetshwayo District Municipality. With over 83,000 listeners, our programming promotes social cohesion through 70% isiZulu and 30% English content. Our coverage spans Umhlathuze, Nkandla, Mfolozi, Umlalazi, and Mthonjaneni municipalities.
2. **Ikhwezi laseMthatha**: Established in March 2007, Ikhwezi laseMthatha is a newspaper entirely in isiXhosa, aiming to promote and preserve indigenous language in media. Based in Mthatha, it covers the OR Tambo region, including towns like Tsolo, Qumbu, Libode, Port St. Johns, and Lusikisiki. Published twice monthly, its target audience falls within the LSM range of 3-9.
3. **Izwi Lomphakathi:** Izwi Lomphakathi Newspaper, entirely in isiZulu, was swiftly established at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its publisher, a seasoned journalist with over 21 years of experience, has worked with notable newspapers such as The New Age, Daily Sun, and Sowetan. The newspaper's mission is to promote reading, disseminate information to the community, and revive the culture of reading in indigenous languages. Going online will further its aim of educating and informing the public about local and national news.

Legal contracts and Procedures

The SANEF Digitisation Drive not only involved project execution but also required the establishment of legal documents to safeguard the interests of all parties involved: the partners, service provider (MeD8 Media), and SANEF, the funder. These legal documents included agreements between the service provider and SANEF, partners and SANEF, as well as contracts outlining partner requests for items aiding news gathering.

Furthermore, we implemented and communicated a needs analysis approach for all requests within the project. Each request underwent scrutiny to ensure alignment with the core objectives of digitisation, news gathering, distribution, and sustainability. This process ensured clarity and adherence to project goals while protecting the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Site Visit Planning and Business Consultation

As an integral part of the project, site visits were essential for understanding the specific needs of each publisher in their working environment. These visits also aimed to assess potential commercial opportunities such as advertising, sponsorships, and donations. Planning for site visits involved considering the costs, outlining the program to be delivered, and defining expected outcomes to provide tailored support to partners.

Moreover, site visits served as a reinforcement of the training conducted during workshops and facilitated skills transfer to partners' employees and volunteers. Beyond skill enhancement and business assessment, these visits played a crucial role in motivating partners by providing them with individualized attention to reignite their business aspirations.

Technical - Platform, Advertising, Hosting, Processes

In accordance with SANEF's tender requirements, the implementation plan prioritized a scalable approach, incorporating WordPress or equivalent CMS for content management and web publication, along with social media strategies and management tools. The choice of CMS was crucial, with scalability being a primary consideration. WordPress Multisite was selected for its ability to duplicate sites and its extensive support resources, including YouTube tutorials and WordPress-specific training. This platform also facilitated easy transfer of site assets post-project, if publishers chose not to renew, simplifying data transfer through WordPress tools or file downloads.

Additionally, domain registration and hosting were critical components, ensuring content backup, daily backups, consideration of data file size, and cost-effectiveness. Traffic control was another key aspect, necessitating solutions to handle sudden spikes in site traffic without downtime. Comparisons were made between local and international service providers, with emphasis on reliability and robustness. Ultimately, a reliable third-party provider offering domain registration, hosting, backup, and traffic control was chosen to support the project's technical requirements effectively.

Audience management and acquisition plan

During this phase, we executed an audience management plan by setting up individual analytics tools and devising social media strategies to drive traffic. Facebook pages were established for the pilot publishers, and a standard practice of publishing and sharing content was instituted. Considering that partners may have varying levels of familiarity with audience tracking tools, we

implemented a central analytics theme to simplify statistics, enabling top-level reporting such as New Visitors, Repeat Visitors, Page Impressions, Average pageviews per publisher, and traffic source (Social or direct). A scheduled Monthly report was provided to the publishers, with the tool designed for scalability in the second round of publishers.

Custom CMS Dashboard

We developed a custom CMS dashboard tailored for publishers/broadcasters, recognizing that they often rely on volunteers and may find the standard Wordpress Dashboard challenging. This custom dashboard includes a checklist feature to ensure that publishers do not overlook key elements of a new story, enhancing efficiency and accuracy in content creation.

We further enhanced the custom dashboard by integrating AI tools for grammar, spelling, and tone checks on articles. These tools also assist in creating headlines and updating website content. Additionally, publishers have direct access to royalty-free stock images from the dashboard, enabling them to use high-quality photos they may not have captured themselves. The stock image feature, particularly popular for crime-related articles, has proven to be a valuable asset for publishers.

Phase 2: Full Rollout - Overview

Expanding from the Pilot phase insights, the full rollout phase included 12 new partners. It entailed workshops, site visits, and the development of the CMSS platform, offering support to non-selected applicants. We also addressed the needs of existing publishers ("Haves") seeking digitization assistance. Challenges during this phase included prolonged interviews due to load shedding and varied expectations from second-round applicants, leading to some opting out of shortlisting.

Selection and Onboarding

The selected partners include both "Haves" and "Have-nots," referring to those with and without existing digital assets for their community media organizations. Their profiles and progress reports can be found in this report under the sections labeled Partner Profile and Progress.

1. **Icamagu News**: Providing current affairs, dialogues, content creation, and entertainment primarily to rural communities with isiXhosa content.
2. **Soweto Sunrise News**: Focusing on uplifting local communities with positive content and advanced marketing tools for corporate partnerships.
3. **Phetheho News**: Serving Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality with bilingual content in Sesotho and English, offering comprehensive coverage of local events and issues.
4. **Inkundla Yezindaba**: Originally an educational initiative, now focusing on community engagement in the INK/PINK area through monthly publication.

5. **Tshwane Bulletin**: Known for investigative journalism, covering community news, opinion, entertainment, and sports in Soshanguve.
6. **Seipone Madireng**: Unique for publishing in Northern Sotho.
7. **Eastern Cape Women's Magazine**: Profiles women's development initiatives and promotes reading and writing in the Eastern Cape.
8. **North West Times**: Providing local, international, and national content, aiming to eradicate poverty and crime while promoting local arts and culture.
9. **Highveld Chronicle**: Covers the Nkangala District Municipality, focusing on interactive and informative news.
10. **Loxion News**: A township-to-township newspaper aimed at revealing the brighter side of living in black townships. Loxion News publishes its print publication monthly, while their LOXION NEWS NETWORK Facebook page uploads cutting-edge mini documentaries and stories daily.
11. **The Eye News**: Operating in Limpopo, publishing in Tsonga, English, and Sepedi, with a focus on investigative reporting.
12. **RFM Community Radio**: Servicing the Acornhoek community of Limpopo, particularly Thulamahash. This MDDA funded station aims to provide news, entertainment, and information to its listeners.

Partner Profiles and Progress

Monitoring progress

Monitoring the progress of each partner is crucial to ensure their digitisation journey is successful. This involves assessing their digital presence and operational challenges before the project began to understand their starting point and specific needs. Regular monitoring helps identify areas where partners may need additional support or realignment with global and local digital trends.

Daily and weekly monitoring of social media platforms and Google Analytics is also part of the process, providing valuable insights into their online performance. The establishment of WhatsApp groups enables real-time data collection on challenges they face, ensuring immediate support.

Monthly feedback forms are sent to publishers, allowing them to report on their progress and provide satisfaction reports to the service provider. This feedback is essential for steering the project towards fulfilling its scope and objectives. By addressing any issues promptly and adapting strategies as needed, we can help partners achieve a fruitful digitisation drive.

Comprehensive Business Study and Consultation

As part of the project, site visits were conducted with each publisher to gain a thorough understanding of their legacy (traditional media) business. These visits involved a detailed business study and commercial viability assessment, ens

uring we had a clear picture of their existing operations and challenges. This face-to-face interaction was vital for building trust and offering tailored advice.

During the site visits, we provided business consultation to help publishers balance maintaining their existing business while capitalising on the digitisation drive initiative. This included discussing the optimistic yet realistic approaches needed to integrate digital strategies into their operations effectively. We focused on identifying new income streams and ensuring publishers had future plans or adjustments to their business strategies that incorporated digital elements.

The consultations also aimed to motivate publishers by highlighting the potential benefits of digitisation, such as reaching broader audiences and creating new revenue opportunities. By helping them develop sustainable digital strategies, we ensured they were well-equipped to navigate the transition from traditional to digital media.
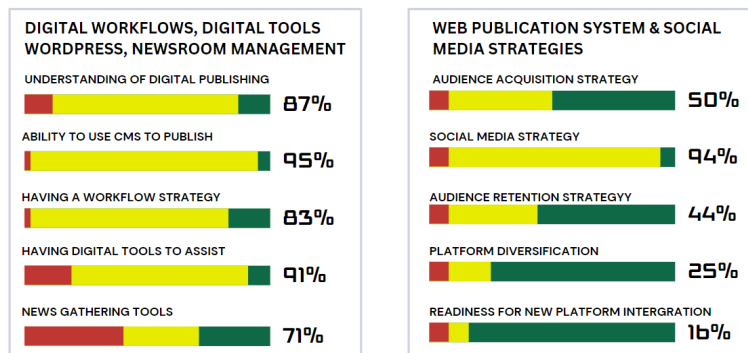
NORTH COAST RADIO

KwaZulu-Natal

MS SITHEMBILE ZONDO

North Coast Community Radio (104 FM)

North Coast Community Radio (104 FM) is a registered NPO (NPO number 054-646-NPO) established in 2003 and licensed as a broadcaster in 2008. We prioritize delivering relevant, empowering, accurate, and reliable information to our community. With over 83,000 listeners, our programming, which is 70% isiZulu and 30% English, fosters social cohesion between rural and urban areas. Our coverage includes the entire King Cetshwayo District Municipality, comprising Umhlathuze, Nkandla, Mfolozi, Umlalazi and Mthonjaneni.

● Before Digitisation Drive   ● Progress Made   ● Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.

DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING — 87%

ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH — 95%

HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY — 83%

HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST — 91%

NEWS GATHERING TOOLS — 71%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY — 50%

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY — 94%

AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY — 44%

PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION — 25%

READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION — 16%
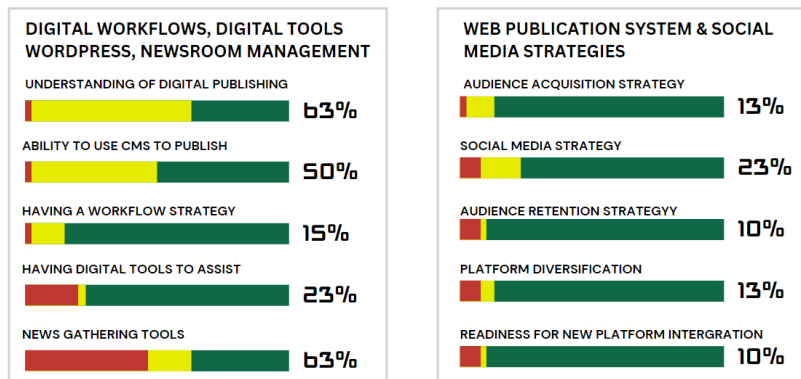
SANEF

Ikhwezi News

Eastern Cape

MONWABISI KHININDA

Ikhwezi laseMthatha

Ikhwezi laseMthatha, established in March 2007, is a newspaper dedicated to promoting and preserving the use of indigenous language and storytelling in the media space. Published entirely in isiXhosa, our main objective is to serve the OR Tambo region. Based in Mthatha, we cover towns including Mthatha, Tsolo, Qumbu, Libode, Port St. Johns, and Lusikisiki. The newspaper is published twice monthly.
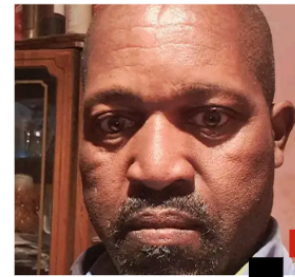
🔴 Before Digitisation Drive   🟡 Progress Made   🟢 Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.

DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING — 63%

ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH — 50%

HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY — 15%

HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST — 23%

NEWS GATHERING TOOLS — 63%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY — 13%

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY — 23%

AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY — 10%

PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION — 13%

READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION — 10%
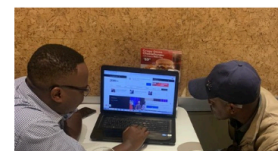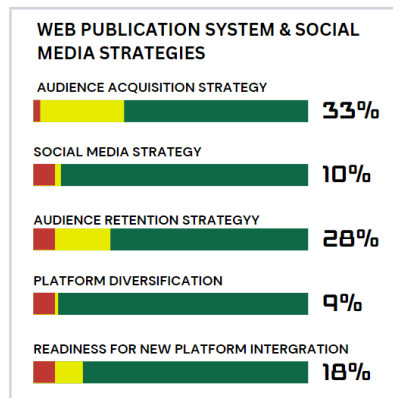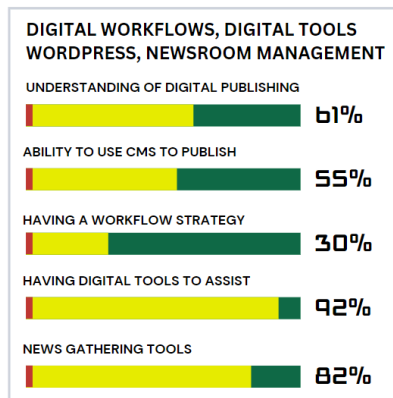
Izwi Lomphakathi KZN

LANGELIHLE LUCAS CHAGEE

Izwi Lomphakathi Newspaper

Izwi Lomphakathi Newspaper, entirely in isiZulu, was established during the COVID-19 pandemic. With over 21 years of experience, its publisher has worked with notable newspapers like The New Age, Daily Sun, and Sowetan. The newspaper's mission is to promote reading, share community information, and revive the culture of reading in indigenous languages. Going online will further educate and inform the public about local and national news.

🔴 Before Digitisation Drive   🟡 Progress Made   🟢 Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.

DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING — 61%

ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH — 55%

HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY — 30%

HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST — 92%

NEWS GATHERING TOOLS — 82%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY — 33%

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY — 10%

AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY — 28%

PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION — 9%

READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION — 18%

FANELO MASEKO

Loxion News

Loxion News, a township-to-township newspaper, highlights the vibrant aspects of living in black townships. With a monthly print edition and daily uploads on their LOXION NEWS NETWORK Facebook page, they provide engaging mini documentaries and stories.

● Before Digitisation Drive   ● Progress Made   ● Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.
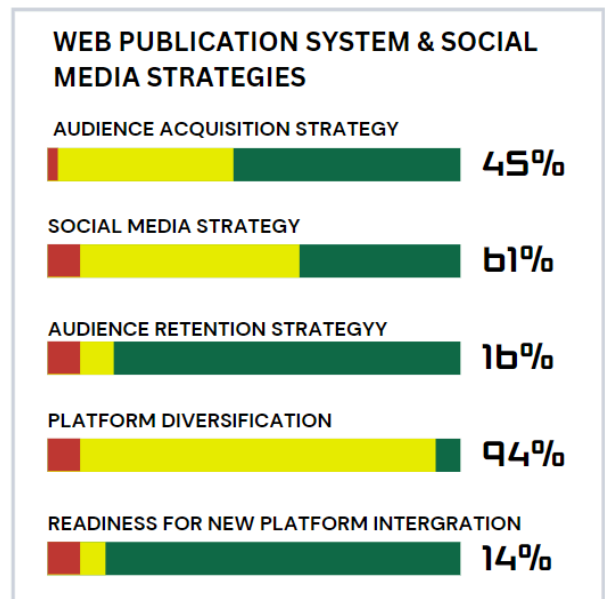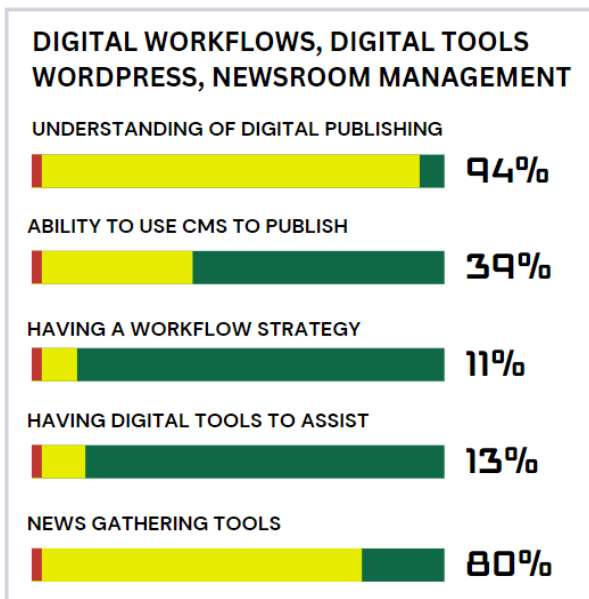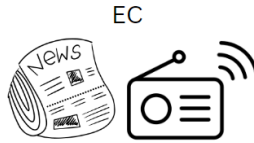
DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING
94%

ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH
39%

HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY
11%

HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST
13%

NEWS GATHERING TOOLS
80%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY
45%

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY
61%

AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY
16%

PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION
94%

READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION
14%

ICAMAGU NEWS

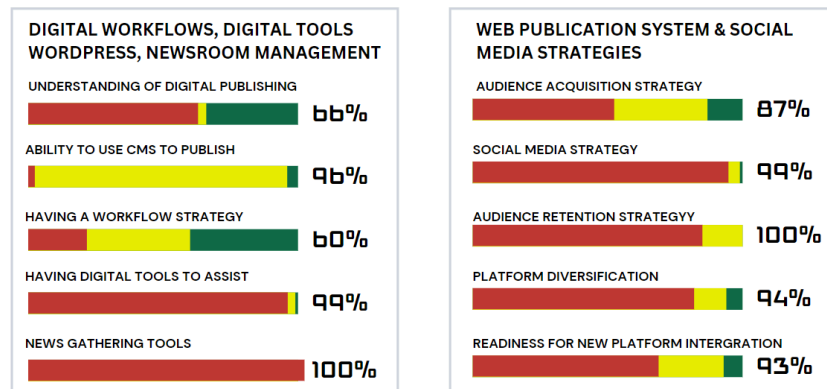**Icamagu News & Online Radio**

EC

MR LULAMA MPAHLA

Icamagu News

IIcamagu News, part of Icamagu Media, offers a diverse range of content including current affairs, dialogues, and entertainment, catering mainly to rural communities. Through print media and digital radio, it promotes indigenous languages like isiXhosa and engages in linguistic programs in the Eastern Cape Province, fostering community engagement and cultural preservation.
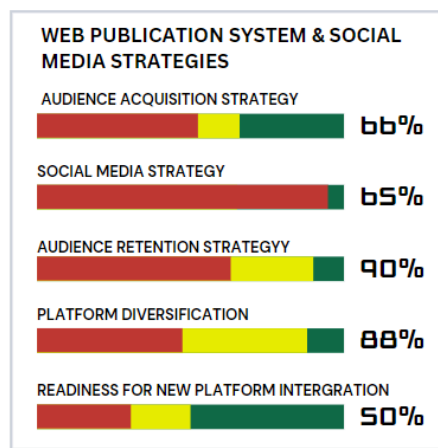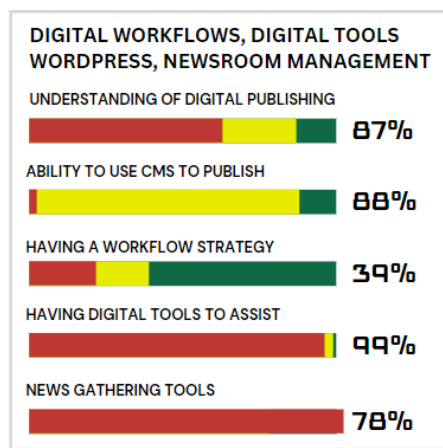

● Before Digitisation Drive ● Progress Made ● Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.

DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING	66%
ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH	96%
HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY	60%
HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST	99%
NEWS GATHERING TOOLS	100%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY	87%
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY	99%
AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY	100%
PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION	94%
READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION	93%

Tshwane Bulletin LIVE

Tshwane Bulletin
GP

TEBOGO MODIBA

🔴 Before Digitisation Drive   🟡 Progress Made   🟢 Potential

The progress bar illustrates the partners' initial states and their advancements since the drive.

DIGITAL WORKFLOWS, DIGITAL TOOLS WORDPRESS, NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT

UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL PUBLISHING
87%

ABILITY TO USE CMS TO PUBLISH
88%

HAVING A WORKFLOW STRATEGY
39%

HAVING DIGITAL TOOLS TO ASSIST
99%

NEWS GATHERING TOOLS
78%

WEB PUBLICATION SYSTEM & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

AUDIENCE ACQUISITION STRATEGY
66%

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY
65%

AUDIENCE RETENTION STRATEGYY
90%

PLATFORM DIVERSIFICATION
88%

READINESS FOR NEW PLATFORM INTERGRATION
50%

Other Profile and Reports

AVAILABLE ON

https://communitymss.co.za/partners/

MEET THE PARTNERS

Introducing the recipients of the SANEF digitization project. SANEF, the leading advocate for media freedom in South Africa, encompasses title editors, senior journalists, media trainers, and academics across print, broadcasting, and digital platforms. From national to community media, they represent a diverse spectrum. SANEF's mission involves upholding journalistic ethics, reflecting South Africa's diversity, safeguarding freedom of expression, and ensuring journalism's sustainability. Recognizing community media's vital role in media diversity, SANEF addresses challenges faced by these outlets and endeavors to enhance digital content distribution and revenue strategies for future growth, aiming to secure a vibrant future for journalism.

SANEF will advertise more opportunities as they become available. – VISIT wwwsanef.org.za or keep coming back to read more industry news on our Community section of this website.

- **+ Icamagu News**
- **+ Soweto Sunrise News**
- **+ Izwi Lomphakathi Newspaper**
- **+ Loxion News**
- **+ Phetheho News**
- **+ Ikhwezi Publishers and Photography**
- **+ North Coast Community Radio (104 FM)**
- **+ Inkundla Yezindaba**
- **+ Tshwane Bulletin**
- **+ Seipone Madireng**
- **+ R fm**
- **+ Eastern Cape Womens Magazine**
- **+ North West Times**
- **+ Highveld Chronicle**
- **+ The Eye News**

Achievements

The project achieved significant milestones, including the successful installation of 13 WordPress sites, employing both Multisite infrastructure and adopting individual installations on existing sites. Over 32 publishers, media company owners, and their staff received comprehensive training, empowering them with the necessary skills for digital newsgathering, multimedia production, and publication workflows. Furthermore, the establishment of the Community Media Support Services (CMSS) platform provided ongoing support and valuable resources. The project also initiated fortnightly virtual meetings, with an impressive 70% attendance rate from Association of Independent Publishers members, facilitating valuable "Pop-in Training" sessions with an average of 20 participants per session. Additionally, physical training sessions directly at workplaces engaged over 45 individuals, effectively addressing their specific challenges and offering tailored solutions.

Achievements Breakdown

Digital Infrastructure Development

- **WordPress Site Installations**
  - Successfully installed 13 WordPress sites.
  - Upgrading and customizing 2 existing sites
  - Employed both Multisite infrastructure and individual installations on existing sites.
  - Set Up of Community Media Support services platform on wordpress
  - Establishing an E-Press Platform that is parked for a news aggregator project using Wordpress and rss feeds.

Training and Capacity Building

- **Comprehensive Training**
  - Trained over 32 publishers, media company owners, and their staff.
  - Focus on digital newsgathering, multimedia production, and publication workflows.
- **Physical Training**
  - Conducted physical training sessions at workplaces.
  - Engaged over 45 individuals.
  - Addressed specific challenges and provided tailored solutions.

Ongoing Support and Resources

- **Community Media Support Services (CMSS) Platform**
  - Established a platform providing continuous support and valuable resources.

Virtual Training and Meetings

- **Fortnightly Virtual Meetings**
  - Initiated regular virtual meetings.
  - Achieved a 70% attendance rate from Association of Independent Publishers members.
  - Conducted "Pop-in Training" sessions with an average of 20 participants per session.

Expansion on Achievements

Digital Infrastructure Development

- **WordPress Site Installations**
  - The project successfully installed 13 WordPress sites, enhancing the digital presence of community media. The use of Multisite infrastructure facilitated efficient management of multiple sites, while individual installations on existing sites allowed for customization to meet specific needs.
  - Future planning of expanding each publishers new offering to establish digital only platform in areas they see as being underserviced.
  - Allowing for a central desk to have an infrastructure of creating / producing supplementary content such as lifestyle, sports, motoring and other content that the newsroom is not capable of producing.

Training and Capacity Building

- **Comprehensive Training**
  - Over 32 publishers, media company owners, and their staff were equipped with essential skills in digital newsgathering, multimedia production, and publication workflows. This training aimed to ensure that all partners could effectively utilize digital tools to enhance their news production and distribution processes.

- **Physical Training**
  - Conducted on-site training sessions engaged over 45 individuals, providing hands-on support and addressing specific challenges. These sessions allowed

trainers to understand the unique needs of each partner and offer tailored solutions to improve their digital operations.

Ongoing Support and Resources

- **Community Media Support Services (CMSS) Platform**
  - The establishment of the CMSS platform ensured continuous support and access to valuable resources. This platform serves as a central hub for tutorials, troubleshooting guides, and industry updates, helping partners stay informed and capable of managing their digital presence effectively.

Virtual Training and Meetings

- **Fortnightly Virtual Meetings**
  - Regular virtual meetings were initiated to provide ongoing support and training. With a high attendance rate of 70% from Association of Independent Publishers members, these "Pop-in Training" sessions have become a valuable resource for continuous learning and improvement. Each session averages 20 participants, fostering a collaborative environment for sharing knowledge and best practices.

By categorizing and expanding on these achievements, it becomes clear how each component contributed to the overall success and sustainability of the project.

Impact Analysis

Beneficiary Feedback

Testimonials and case studies from partners highlight the project's positive impact. Each partner submits monthly feedback forms, helping us gauge their satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. We maintain daily communication with partners through group messages, ensuring they receive timely assistance and updates on their sites. This ongoing support is essential for keeping the project on track and addressing any issues promptly, ensuring smooth progress and fulfilled expectations.

Community Reach and Engagement

Since the launch of the first pilot site, audience reach has significantly increased. Each subsequent site has shown month-on-month growth in traffic. For instance, Icamagu News, which launched in April, generated over 10,000 impressions in May, driven by the coverage of the taxi war in the Eastern Cape. This coverage would not have reached the community without the online version of the newspaper and radio station. This is just one example of the digitisation drive's impact. The establishment of TikTok accounts (e.g., Icamagu News, North West Times) and YouTube channels (e.g., North Coast Radio, Soweto Sunrise News, Loxion News, Izwi

Lomphakathi News) has enabled the production of video content, catering to readers who engage primarily through multimedia. This approach aligns with the project's goal to diversify content types and facilitate new workflows in newsrooms. Additionally, over eight new Facebook pages were created for partners without such platforms, driving traffic and keeping communities engaged and updated. The introduction of publishing, sharing, and distributing news via WhatsApp and WhatsApp Channels has further enhanced engagement. This demonstrates the project's success in reaching and involving communities through digital platforms.

Evaluating Platform Viability and Capacity

Even though publishers had ideas for various platforms, some were excluded due to the newsroom's capacity to maintain them. For instance, many publishers wanted TikTok accounts, but some lacked the experience and understanding of the platform. TikTok requires a specific approach to content creation and engagement that some newsrooms were not prepared for. This led to the decision to focus on platforms where the publishers had more familiarity and confidence in maintaining a consistent presence. Similarly, podcasting emerged as a popular interest among publishers. However, podcasting requires significant resources, including equipment, bandwidth, and licensing to run streams online. The cost of internet connection and the capacity to sustainably maintain the production of high-quality content posed challenges. Recognizing these limitations, we built structures to accommodate podcasts on websites. This approach allows publishers to gradually develop their podcasting capabilities while ensuring that they can maintain and grow other digital platforms effectively. By taking a steady approach before full deployment, we aim to ensure that publishers can successfully integrate these new content forms into their digital strategies without overwhelming their existing resources.

Advertising / Sponsorship and Commercial Opportunities Impact

The Digitisation Drive identified several barriers to commercial sustainability for publishers and broadcasters. A significant issue was the lack of a properly calculated rate card for their legacy businesses (print newspapers and radio stations). To address this, we assisted publishers in developing a formula for creating a commercially viable rate card for traditional media.

Collaboration with Marnox Media

With the expertise of Marnox Media, an independent media and advertising representative company established in 2002, we established a solid foundation for rate card development. Marnox Media, based in Randburg, South Africa, represents various media owners across Africa, facilitating the buying of advertising space for clients in multiple African countries.

Development of Rate Cards

Using Marnox Media's insights, we provided comprehensive training to establish benchmark rates for both traditional and digital assets. We understood that in the early stages of the digital

sites being live, high revenue from display ads and other forms of advertising could not be expected due to lower initial traffic. However, most publishers embraced the creation of new rate cards, digital rate cards, and professionally presented company profiles, making their offerings more attractive to advertisers and stakeholders.

Additional Support and Results

Furthermore, the Community Media Support Services (CMSS) assisted with proposal writing for potential advertisers, enhancing the publishers' ability to secure funding. As a result, partners experienced improved revenue options through diversified content distribution, contributing to their economic sustainability.

Access to Mother Tongue Media

Another commercial opportunity was providing indigenous language publishers access to an advertising server service offered by Mother Tongue Media. Developed in South Africa for South Africans, this service ensures advertisers can reach the right audience in their language, supporting the growth of South African publishers and communities. The service offers 100% viewable inventory, with tags placed on over 231 sites and growing, covering languages such as Zulu, Xhosa, Venda, Tsonga, Afrikaans, Tswana, Pedi, Ndebele, Swati, and Sotho.

The project unlocked several commercial opportunities for partners, establishing new advertising partnerships and revenue streams. Case studies from the project highlight successful monetisation strategies, showcasing the positive impact on the partners' commercial viability.

Challenges and Solutions

The project faced transition challenges when the preferred service provider, MeD8 Media, unfortunately had to seek assistance due to health issues and capacity limitations beyond their control. Despite this setback, MeD8 Media employed strategies to accelerate the rollout and meet timelines, ensuring project success. Additionally, there was a significant gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" in community media, with many small publishers and broadcasters lacking the necessary digital infrastructure and resources to compete with larger, well-funded media houses. This initiative worked to bridge that gap by providing equitable access to technology and training.

Service Provider Transition

Challenges were encountered during the transition process from Social Weaver to MeD8 Media, despite which the handover proceeded smoothly, facilitated by the professionalism of both companies and their prior collaboration on projects such as the AIP Sustainability Subcommittee and the USA Ohio Study Trip initiative. Noteworthy in this process was the pivotal role played by Steve Kromberg from Social Weaver. Steve, a seasoned trainer, strategy consultant, and

manager with extensive experience in communication strategy and digital media management, contributed significantly to the project's success. His multifaceted background spanning various roles in journalism, editing, and business ownership proved invaluable.

Additionally, Michael Salzwedel, a digital media expert with a rich history in digital media spanning over a decade, brought his expertise to bear on the project. Michael's experience as an editor and digital media specialist in various reputable organizations, coupled with his role as a digital media trainer, equipped him to understand the nuanced needs of the publishers and to provide tailored solutions. His insights and contributions were instrumental in crafting key elements of the project.

Despite the challenges faced during the transition, the collaboration between Social Weaver and MeD8 Media, bolstered by the expertise and dedication of individuals like Steve Kromberg and Michael Salzwedel, ensured a seamless handover process. Their collective efforts and commitment to the project's objectives played a vital role in addressing the challenges and steering the digitization drive towards success.

Interviews, Connectivity and Coordination

Interviews, Connectivity, and Coordination posed significant challenges during the recruitment phase of the project. Despite receiving 68 applications and the intricate process of shortlisting, preparing interviews, and coordinating panels, the process was effectively managed. External factors such as load shedding and connectivity issues on the applicants' side were mitigated to ensure the smooth execution of the recruitment process as outlined in the project's scope of work Feedback received from Mr. Hopewell commended the approach, recommending partners for their integrity and inclusivity across various media types, gender, language, and provinces. Telephonic interviews were conducted, some of which had to be recorded using additional devices to maintain consistency in record-keeping. MeD8 Media established a Google Drive to streamline the process, making it accessible to SANEF for oversight purposes.

Efforts were made to ensure a fair and inclusive interview process, with every applicant meeting the criteria being interviewed. In instances where publishers or broadcasters faced challenges committing to interviews, alternative methods were explored to accommodate them. Additionally, technical glitches affecting email communication with some applicants were swiftly resolved, ensuring effective communication throughout the recruitment phase.

Onboarding Process and Workshop Coordination.

Onboarding and workshop coordination presented challenges, particularly in gathering partner information and assessing needs. Some publishers struggled to complete the onboarding forms, leading to incomplete or inadequately furnished information. This highlighted varying levels of digital tools proficiency among publishers, as well as language and communication challenges. The MeD8 Media Team successfully navigated these obstacles by communicating with

publishers in their mother tongue or preferred language, demonstrating patience and understanding of the traditional media partners' backgrounds and digital literacy levels.

<u>Tools of the Trade and capacity</u>

Capacity and resources posed challenges, particularly in terms of loading news and providing necessary tools for all employees. Some selected publishers relied on volunteers to assist with news production and organizational operations. While this drive couldn't directly address human resource issues, we observed that some publishers used outdated computers, laptops, and mobile devices. To address this, we tailored solutions on a case-by-case basis within the project scope. The central help desk was instrumental in assisting with news loading, especially during transitions or when training new employees. Support services also helped identify and rectify common errors, improving overall quality. Additionally, plans are underway to establish a central department for lifestyle, sports, and entertainment content, providing supplementary material for publishers experiencing content shortages. Integration of AI tools, such as a stock image function, has facilitated access to royalty-free images, alleviating resource constraints and reducing the need for additional cameras.

Future Plans and Continued Services

The project will continue to provide ongoing support and training through the CMSS. Planned updates and enhancements to digital platforms, future workshops, and site visits will ensure continuous improvement and sustainability. A central development and help desk will support the roll-out and operations of the digital production and online services for the selected newsrooms.

We have established a fortnightly virtual meeting for all digitisation partners and subscribed partners. These sessions have benefited many members of the Association of Independent Publishers, with 31 members receiving free support services. The "Pop-in Training" sessions, held at 10am every second Monday of each month, have achieved a 70% attendance rate.

Conclusion

As we approach the final month of the digitization drive, we're transitioning towards our planned Community Media Support Services, focusing on sustainability objectives. While some projects may not achieve significant success, there's a willingness among participants to continue self-funding. Others are poised to generate revenue, sustaining their digital businesses. This shift marks an important phase in our journey towards empowering community media in the digital age.

Support Site, Manual, and Resources

Content Overview

The onboarding data will help the project align its support guides to best fit the needs of the Publisher/Broadcaster.

Platform

In this guide, WordPress is explored as a powerful content management system that makes creating and managing digital publications effortless. Topics like online privacy, security, and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) are covered, helping protect sensitive data in the digital landscape. Additionally, there is a non-technical overview of domains and emails, providing a strong foundation in these fundamental aspects of online publishing.

WordPress for News Publishers & Broadcasters

Key sections include the introduction to hosting, domains, and emails, the basics of online privacy, security, and POPIA, and comprehensive guides on how to navigate and utilise WordPress for digital publishing. Each section is designed with a specific theme and colour coding to facilitate easy navigation and understanding.

Content, Traffic & Reach

This section covers transitioning from periodic publishing to daily online publishing, understanding different types of online news readers, optimising for mobile and computer devices, and basic analytics concepts using tools like Google Analytics and WordPress plugins. Marketing your news effectively, publishing dos and don'ts including copyright and image usage, and maintaining ethical practices are also addressed.

Commercial

This section encompasses effective advertising implementation, including different online ad formats, optimising ad placement, targeting options, and leveraging data for personalised ads. Monetisation models such as CPC, CPM, and affiliate marketing are explored, alongside managing ad operations and optimising ad performance. Guidance on developing 360-degree rate cards and managing social media and YouTube advertising is provided, with case studies illustrating successful strategies.

Workflow, Resources and Free Tools

This section includes design tools, AI tools, workflow recommendations, stock image platforms, content discovery, and utilising WhatsApp as a digital newsroom. User-friendly design tools, AI tools for streamlining tasks and content creation, and workflow recommendations with real-world examples are covered. Strategies for finding and curating relevant content and using WhatsApp as a digital newsroom are also explored.

South African Case Studies - Digital Transformation

Case studies include Caxton Local Media, Mail & Guardian, Daily Maverick, O FM, and Mpondo Times. These examples provide insights into successful digital transformations within the South African media landscape, offering practical lessons and inspiration for community media organisations.

Manuals and Content Resources

A comprehensive suite of manuals and resources was developed to support the digital transformation of community media partners. These materials include detailed guides on using WordPress, managing online privacy and security in line with POPIA, and effectively handling domains and emails. Additionally, there are resources on transitioning to daily online publishing, understanding online news readers, optimising for different devices, and utilising basic analytics tools.

Advertising resources cover various formats, monetisation models, and strategies for implementing and managing digital ads. Workflow recommendations and tools, such as design and AI tools, are provided to enhance efficiency and content quality. Real-world case studies illustrate successful digital transformations, offering valuable insights and inspiration for community media organisations.

External resources include the "Reporting the Courts: A Guide for South African Journalists," the "Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media," information on the 2019 South African elections, an inquiry into media ethics and credibility, and a report on the new state of media. These resources provide additional guidance and support for community media partners, ensuring they have access to comprehensive and relevant information for their digital journey.

Resources Developed for the Drive

Tutorials / Guides and Manuals - https://communitymss.co.za/community/
Tutorials / Guides and Manuals - Working files / Presentations available on request
Rate Cards and Profiles: Available on Request

Ongoing Pop-In Training:
1. https://communitymss.co.za/video-pop-in-virtual-training-case-study-pondoland-times/
2. https://communitymss.co.za/video-canva-for-south-african-media-pop-in-training-sessions/
3. Others available on Youtube

Project Plan and Timelines - Available to SANEF on request
Budget breakdown and Usage Report - Available to SANEF on request
Communication and recruitment resources -
https://sanef.org.za/sanef-second-call-for-independent-newsrooms-to-join-community-media-digitisation-drive/ (View others on SANEF website)
Workshop and Site Visit photos - Available to SANEF on request
Applicants Applications and Recruitment folder drive of video interviews and scripts - Available to SANEF on request
Timesheet access and task ID's - Available to SANEF on request
Access to Previous reports - Available to SANEF on request

Sites Developed - (Click on Partners Profile) https://communitymss.co.za/partners/
Service providers
1. Social Weaver - https://www.socialweaver.co.za/
2. MeD8 Media - https://www.med8.co.za/
Third Party Services
1. Howdy Press - https://howdypress.com/
2. Marnox Media - https://marnox.co.za/
3. Mother Tongue Media - https://mothertonguemedia.co.za/
Project associated to:
Association of Independent Media - https://aip.org.za/
Offered by:
South African National Editors Forum - https://sanef.org.za/