

HARVEST FM

HARVEST FM
CHANGE IS IN THE AIR



mlekhoaba@harvestfm.co.ls

CHANGE IS IN **THE AIR**

Malichaba Lekhoaba explains how Harvest FM has helped achieve social freedom by exposing corruption, forging a strong working relationship with the incoming government and fighting for local communities

WRITTEN BY: **GAY SUTTON**
RESEARCH BY: **JAMES BOYLE**





Malichaba Lekhoaba
broadcasting to the nation

Harvest FM has been broadcasting to the citizens of Lesotho since May 2003. Registered in November 2002 as a charity by the current station manager Malichaba Lekhoaba, Harvest broadcasts 24 hours a day producing a mixture of spiritual and current affairs programmes that rigorously tackle the nation’s leading social and political issues. Since 2007 Harvest has earned international respect for its courage in daring to highlight and eradicate corruption in all its forms, and has received the prestigious PMR Africa award for best radio station three years running.

“We have based the radio station on Christian principles,” Lekhoaba explained, “and our vision for Harvest is to inform people about the Christian faith, and their rights as citizens of this country.”

The station currently employs 19 salaried staff, a mixture of journalists, presenters and administrative workers. However, the road to such stability and success has not been easy. “We have been through some very difficult periods,” Lekhoaba continued. Launching the station was a triumph of determination and dedication in itself. With no funding to cover expenses, she had to rely on the services of a group of volunteers to run the station, and worked to build up a portfolio of advertisers to cover running costs.

In 2007, following a review of the station’s financial performance, she began to introduce a series of current affairs programmes,

understanding that not only would the topical content attract increased advertising revenue but that the station could have an important role to play in bringing political and social issues to the public, and informing them.

It was a brave move, and one that has had a formative effect on the country’s political landscape. At the time, Lesotho was going through a period of what Lekhoaba describes as political instability. “We had really hard talk on some of these programmes, much of it about political corruption,” she explained.

As a result of this new content the listenership increased dramatically and advertising revenue rose correspondingly, but the relationship with Government and the national regulator, Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA), deteriorated rapidly. “The ruling party at that time was not comfortable with what we said about them, and they complained to the LCA.”

The station was repeatedly shut down for a few days in 2007, and then in 2008 Harvest was suspended for a 12 month period. It was a catastrophic event. Advertising revenue, the station’s only source of income, ceased abruptly. Staff had to be sent home without pay. However the suspension was reduced to 3 months on the understanding that the station would not commit similar ‘offences’ within the 12 month period.

“Effectively we were closed for three months and during that time we lost our listeners and advertisers. But that didn’t stop us,” Lekhoaba asserted. “When we came

2003

Year Harvest FM began broadcasting

back on air we worked very hard to win back our listenership and our advertisers, and we made it through.”

Between 2009 and early this year Harvest has had a difficult tightrope to walk, bringing out programmes that highlighted and discussed important social and political issues, and yet did so in such a way that did not incur suspension. The station’s editorial policy demands that all stories are balanced, and yet there was such a climate of fear that the public were afraid to express opinions about Government, and the ruling party refused to provide information to journalists or the public.

Throughout this period the Government consistently refused permission for Harvest

to place its transmitters in the national network of transmission towers and as a result the programmes only reached people in the capital and a few outlying areas. However, the impact of those hard hitting programmes has been enormous. In the general election in early 2012 the old government was overturned. “And it was in the capital, where people were informed about the corruption, that the ruling party lost the election,” she said. In the regions – outside Harvest’s transmission footprint – the ruling party continued to receive high numbers of votes.

Today, the old regime has been replaced by a new one that is not only more media savvy but is running the country differently. Much

“TODAY, THE OLD REGIME HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A NEW ONE THAT IS NOT ONLY MORE MEDIA SAVVY BUT IS RUNNING THE COUNTRY DIFFERENTLY”

has changed for Harvest. “We are able to talk freely about Government officials, and when we find evidence of corruption their doors are open for discussion,” Lekhoaba said. A great example of this is Harvest’s outreach programme, where journalists and presenters meet with communities and interview the public on local issues. “We tried this under the previous Government but people were too scared to talk. Now they are free to say what they want. And in many cases Government officials listen to the programme, respond on air and take action.”

The relationship with LCA, which is no longer under political pressure to restrain Harvest, has also improved dramatically and is now fair and positive. “We do get complaints,” Lekhoaba admitted, although this is bound to happen with any media organisation that sets out to challenge the standards and performance of those in power. “But the complaints no longer come from LCA, they come through lawyers.”

One of Harvest’s big challenges now is to extend its transmission footprint across the entire country, and it is currently in talks with Government to use the national transmission network. Lekhoaba also aims to establish an independent Harvest TV station and is in the process of applying for a licence.

The organisation continues to be run as a charity and all profits are reinvested into the community. Harvest has a range of ongoing community support programmes including sponsoring vulnerable children and orphans through high school. The latest community campaign has been to examine the management and financing of orphanages, to root out corruption and the misuse of funds. “We don’t want government to close these homes,” she pointed out. “We want to encourage them to run the homes properly and fairly. At the moment, it’s the children who are suffering.”

Much has changed this year for Harvest. Journalists can now do their job freely, the relationship with Government and LCA is very good, and the station is no longer under threat. But Lekhoaba is aware that with this freedom comes great responsibility. “Now we have the freedom, we must ensure that we are always improving the way we work. We must continue doing our job without favour, and support the people of this country according to our Christian principles.” **BE**



For more information about Harvest FM contact:
mlekhoaba@harvestfm.co.ls

HARVEST FM

HARVEST FM

mlekhoaba@harvestfm.co.ls

Produced by:

ACHIEVING BUSINESS EXCELLENCE ONLINE

BE Business Excellence

www.bus-ex.com