

**STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN COMMUNITY MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE CASE  
STUDY OF *ALEX NEWS* AND *GREATER ALEX TODAY***

by

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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DATE: 4 November 2020

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research project to my parents, my late father, Smart Mthatshelwa Moyo and my mother, Senzeni Rosemary Mazibanhanga. My father highly believed in me and had a dream that one day I will achieve this degree. Unfortunately, he is no longer here to witness my achievement and I know he is proud of me. To my mother thank you for your unconditional love, support and inspiration. I have made it again!!!!

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate whether community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society using a comparative study of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. This study is as the result of an outcry from various stakeholders claiming that community print media is no longer playing its developmental role in society due to the impact of structure and agency. They also claim that community media is no longer representing the interests and needs of the communities that it serves and lacks community participation. There are also concerns that community print media is no longer serving historically disadvantaged communities and is failing in its role to disseminate information in the community. They claimed that the control and ownership of community media is not in the hands of the community that it is supposed to serve, but in the hands of outsiders who are after business opportunities and profit-making.

The qualitative research method was used for this study and the findings correlated with the literature reviewed. It concluded that the constraints of structure and agency is shaping the role of community media in society. Based on these findings the research recommends that government should assist the community newspapers by providing a subsidised printing machine that can be placed in a central place for easy access by the community newspapers. It also recommends that the community newspaper should transform from the traditional newspaper print to digital media to cut the printing costs and that the government should allocate more funds to MDDA.

**KEYS TERMS:** community media, developmental mandate, structure and agency, access to resources, staffing , self-regulation, ownership and control, independence of community media, participation in community media, sustainability in community media, sustainability in community media, political economy , critical political economy, funding, training and skills.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIP	Association of Independent Publishers
ANC	African National Congress
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
MDDA	Media Development and Diversity Agency
NCMF	National Community Media Forum

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This is an empirical enquiry that investigates the role of community print media in fulfilling its developmental mandate in society. It is a result of strongly expressed claims by civil society, academics and communities that community print media is no longer playing its developmental role in society. It is said that community media is no longer representing the interests and needs of the communities that it serves and lacks community participation. There are also concerns that community print media is no longer serving historically disadvantaged communities and is failing in its role to disseminate information in the community. In short, it is claimed that the control and ownership of community media is not in the hands of the community that it is supposed to serve, but in the hands of outsiders who are after business opportunities and profit-making (Weinberg 2011).

These claims highlight how structure and agency is impacting negatively on community media. According to Weinberg (2011), community media house should operate as a non-profit making organisation that provides a service to a community. It should operate independently and should allow community participation, but limited resources and opportunities are affecting its capability to operate independently. The structure of community media has been affected; hence there is an outcry from civil society about the developmental role of community media in society. This study, therefore, is about how structure and agency in community media is impacting on its developmental mandate in society.

To generate an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of the role of community media, case studies are needed. Therefore, this enquiry uses a comparative study of two community newspapers, namely: *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*. These newspapers both operate in Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg in Gauteng Province. Being owned by two different organisations, however, they are competitors. This makes them a good choice for an empirical enquiry. In order to investigate thoroughly, then, whether the two community newspapers are fulfilling their developmental role in society, the case studies use qualitative research technique.

The qualitative research method of investigation gives us an understanding of how these two newspapers operate and the challenges that they face daily. Firstly, there is information from interviews scheduled and conducted with the top management of the two newspapers, the owners, and editors: as well as the journalists, sales representatives, and freelancers. Secondly, interviews with various stakeholders from the community of Alexandra allow us to ascertain their views on how these two newspapers contribute positively to their community as well as the developmental role that they play. Thirdly, focus groups conducted with community members from different age groups reveal their views on the role that these two community newspapers play in Alexandra Township. These three methods allow for insights to be gained into the operations of the newspapers and the views of their readers.

Further empirical research allows us to ascertain the actual, verifiable content of the newspapers. Content analysis of actual editions of the newspapers is proving essential here. A critical analysis of all editions of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* published in the month of August 2018 in terms of checking content, advertisements and the ratio between advertisements and content is also showing its worth. These methods help us determine whether these two newspapers are representing the community through covering local events and stories relevant to their readers. They also give insight into how much profit is either fairly or unfairly made.

This study is divided into chapters. Chapter One is the introduction, which outlines the main aims of the study and the history of community print media in South Africa, as well as the history of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* newspapers. Chapter Two covers the literature review and theoretical framework; Chapter Three is about methodology; Chapter Four is the presentation of findings; Chapter Five gives the data analysis and interpretation and Chapter Six includes the conclusion and recommendations.

## **1.1 Brief history of community print media in South Africa**

The history of South African media is marked by attempts either to silence and control it or to encourage its growth. During apartheid, media was controlled by the government, despite the existence of a Press Council, which was used not to promote media freedom but as a tool to silence media criticism of the government (Hyde-Clarke 2011:21). As a result, community media emerged in South Africa before 1994 with the core mandate of building a democratic and anti-apartheid society. After the dawn of democracy, the African National Congress (ANC) government made new laws and encouraged development in South African media by promoting media freedom. The new laws regulating the media created a conducive environment for the media industry as a whole to flourish and led to the growth of community media (Maphiri 2012:63).

The role of community media after apartheid was the building and reconstruction of the social fabric of the communities where it operated. It was meant to strengthen social cohesion as well as to facilitate the dissemination of information among communities (Maphiri 2012: 63-64). Previously, white-owned media groups had dominated the media landscape, reinforcing class inequalities and racial divisions. There was therefore a great need to include marginalised groups in the production of their own media (Hatcher 2013:51). A way had to be found to do this.

The government therefore established the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2002 to increase the diversity of both those accessing and producing the media. They also wanted to improve access to media and information in rural areas, which was sorely lacking. According to The MDDA Act (No. 14 of 2002), the MDDA was established to support projects aimed at promoting media development and diversity. The Act provides access to media to previously marginalised and disadvantaged communities as well as encouraging ownership and control of media by these communities (MDDA [sa]). Hatcher (2013:51) asserts that the MDDA Act was established to foster the creation of news to serve historically disadvantaged communities. According to Sparks (2009: 204-205), community media was identified as an area for investment and assistance in terms of fulfilling MDDA's mission to

encourage ownership and control of the media by previously disadvantaged communities.

With the legal framework in place, economic sustainability still had to be dealt with; so, it was decided that an organisation was needed to empower community media in disadvantaged communities. In 2005 the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) was established to improve the quality, and ensure the economic sustainability, of local grassroots independent publications. The AIP, therefore, both promotes the interests of independent publishers as well as empowering them with training. According to Maphiri (2012:67), the organisation's interventions have helped to strengthen local publications in terms of self-sustainability. This short explanation does not present the entire picture, however.

The print media landscape in South Africa has two different types of press: community/ local newspapers and commercial newspapers. The main difference between the two is that community media are not primarily profit-making, but were instead established to serve marginalised communities, while commercial newspapers are designed to be profit-making. Although some community newspapers generate revenue through selling of advertising space, others are funded by various stakeholders that include the MDDA. Community newspapers, however, are distributed free of charge, while commercial newspapers are for sale. Another difference is that community newspapers are community-specific, with local content, while commercial newspapers produce mainstream content (MDDA [sa]).

Ownership of the print media in South Africa is unequal. Major media houses are owned by Naspers, Caxton, Independent Media, Tiso Black Star and Primedia. Some of these companies also own community newspapers; examples are Caxton and Naspers. On the other hand, there are community newspapers owned by community members, organizations and cooperatives within communities. According to Hatcher (2013:51) small independent community media in South Africa face overwhelming competition from Caxton, The Independent Media, Tiso Black Star and Media 24. These large media groups dominate the newspaper landscape, and small independent community newspapers are battling to survive due to unfair competition, unequal practices and marginalisation (Hatcher 2013:52).

## **1.2 Legislation on community print media in South Africa**

South African print media, which includes community newspapers, is self-regulated. The industry is governed through a self-regulation system administered by the Press Ombudsman and Press Council of South Africa. No legislation regulates the South African press apart from the South African Press Code of Conduct (Vilakati & Mavindidze 2014:15). The custodian of the Press Code of Conduct is the Press Council; and print media and online publications are affiliated to the Press Council, which is based on freedom of expression and freedom of media. The press industry believes in independent co-regulation as a way of guaranteeing the freedom of the press and other media as enshrined by the South African Constitution. They also believe that statutory regulation might threaten their independence (Press Council [sa]).

Self-regulation, which is done in-house by media institutions to ensure that their journalists and managers adhere to codes of ethics, has both advantages and disadvantages in a democratic society. Haraszti (2008:11-12) points out that media self-regulation is good for the press because it maintains media's credibility with the public, protects the journalist's independence, promotes media quality and preserves media editorial freedom. Self-regulation is also good for the public in that it provides guarantees about the value of information provided by journalists. On the other hand, Mtinde (2015) argues that the self-regulatory system is failing to hold the press to account despite having the power to order them to apologise for their wrongdoing – because the press fails to adhere to the codes of ethics that are enforced by the self-regulation system, as it does not affect their paycheck. To ensure that community media executes its developmental mandate in society, the media should adhere to the Press Code of Conduct as well as their journalism ethics. Media self-regulation is good for democracy as long as the media does not abuse it.

### **1.3 History of two community newspapers**

*Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* are competing weekly community newspapers that both operate in Alexandra Township (*Alex News* [sa] & *Greater Alex Today* [sa]). *Alex News* is owned by Caxton and has been the voice of Alex community for more than eight years. They distribute 20 000 copies of the newspaper every Thursday. The newspaper content unites the community as it provides relevant local stories and events coverage. *Alex News* is described as a 'village noticeboard' which means that community members use it as a platform to communicate among themselves. The newspaper is executing its mandate in the community of Alexandra by meeting the reader's demands, which are to inform, entertain and educate the local community (*Alex News* [sa]).

*Alex News* also provides weekly retail specials for its readers. It is a good platform for advertisers to advertise their products and services as it is distributed from door to door in Alexandra Township (*Alex News* [sa]). *Alex News* has a team of 42 staff members which include three advertising and sales personnel, seven editorial staff members, three classified advertising staff members, three distribution staff members, three debtors' clerks, five production staff members, three digital staff members and 10 administration staff members. The *Alex News* offices are located outside Alexandra Township in the upper-class suburb of Craighall Park, in Johannesburg North (*Alex News* [sa]).

*Greater Alex Today* was established in 2010 and is an initiative of Kwa-Mgo Media Multi-purpose Primary Co-operative, all the members of which are Alexandra residents. It is 100 percent black-owned and is a level 3 BBBEE contributor. Its primary objectives are to provide the greater Alexandra community with news that empowers them through profiling them and disseminating information around the area (*Greater Alex Today* [sa]). The newspaper distributes 30 000 copies weekly in the greater Alexandra region.

*Greater Alex Today* was voted the best community newspaper at the Sanlam Media Awards in 2013 and won accolades for being one of the best presentable community news reads (*Greater Alex Today* [sa]). The *Greater Alex Today* offices are located at Alex ICT Centre in Marlboro Industrial, Alexandra Township. The newspaper has six



team members, namely: one acting editor who is also the advertising salesperson, two classified advertising staff members, one intern and two freelance journalists. (Greater Alex Today [sa]).

#### **1.4 The research problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society. This comes as the result of an outcry from various stakeholders claiming that community print media is no longer playing its developmental role in society due to the impact of structure and agency. The qualitative research approach is applied to investigate these claims. A comparative study of two community newspaper namely, *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*, is used.

The key research question is:

How is the meaning and role of community print media shaped by the constraints of structure and agency?

The sub-research questions are:

- What is the extent to which community newspapers are fulfilling developmental goals and how effective are they at doing this?
- What are the main factors that determine the fulfilment of the developmental mandate?
- How does structure and agency shape the content of community newspapers?
- How do the political landscape, funding and resources influence the developmental mandate of community newspapers?

The objective of this research is exploratory. The assumptions are that community media has neglected its developmental mandate; that community media's operations and content are shaped by structure and agency; that internal and external constraints hinder the capacity of community media to fulfil their developmental mandate in society. So, an evaluation of the main factors that determine the

fulfilment of the developmental mandate of community media is outlined. An analysis on how structure and agency shape the content of community newspapers is provided. It is also ascertained how political landscape, funding and resources influence the developmental mandate of community media.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

A brief background of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers is outlined in order to give an understanding of how these two newspapers operate. The history of community newspapers in South Africa is discussed to track the development of community newspapers and the role they should play in communities. Regulation of South African print media is also discussed, with an explanation that there is no legislation that regulates the South African press and that the Press Code of Conduct is the main regulator. This chapter also looks at the research questions and sub-questions of this study. The research assumptions and objectives are also outlined.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Frames emanating from empirical work, both quantitative and qualitative, shape this chapter. The seminal work of several scholars on the media in general and community media in particular anchor the discussions in this chapter. The key objective of this literature review is to zero in on this empirical work with the intention to deepen, unravel and critically analyse the complexities that structure the meaning and role of community print media. Six re-occurring themes are drawn from the different scholars and their empirical work. These themes are the developmental role of community media, the independence of community media, participation in community media, ownership and control of community media, sustainability in community media and misconception of community media. For the purposes of coherence and shedding light the critical political economy of the media lens is used to reveal how the specific interconnections of the political and economic power may be understood as shaping both structures and practices in the newsroom. This chapter is therefore divided into two sections. The first section explores the six themes stemming from the empirical work and the second section is the navigation of how the critical political economy of the media lens aids the understanding of power, political and economic, in newsroom practices that in turn shape the role of community media.

#### **2.2 Literature review**

##### ***2.2.1 Developmental role of community media***

The concept of development is about improving the living conditions of a society (Melkote & Steeves 2001:34). According to Okigbo & Eribo (2004:39), development means growth in income, productivity, good quality of life and state of well-being. Development involves ways of alleviating poverty and increasing sustained

economic growth. It not only focuses on economic growth, but also involves social and cultural issues, creating and managing knowledge and the creation and maintenance of institutions (Okigbo & Eribo 2004:39). Community media has a developmental role to play in society. Marais & Linstrom (2011:36) states that Berrigan (1979:8) defines community media as the media that members of the community has access to in terms of information, education and entertainment. According to the MDDA Act 14 of 2002, community media was established in South Africa to provide access to media and information to previously disadvantaged communities (MDDA [sa]). The above definitions of community media explain the developmental role of community media, which is to provide communities with access to information and education, as well as improving people's social way of life through providing a source of entertainment.

Sepokotele (2018) acknowledges that some community newspapers are making a great impact on their communities through reporting local stories that are not often covered by the mainstream media. Access to community media means that disadvantaged communities are now empowered with knowledge about what is happening within their communities, which is part of the developmental role of community media. Rau at al (2008:106) claims that community media also raises awareness of successes and challenges faced by the community. By so doing it assists government, as part of the integrated development plans to deliver most needed services that are meant to bring change and better the lives of people - which is part of the developmental role of community media.

Community media plays an important role in defining community interests and seeing how these community interests are best served by the government as well as educating their audiences about the work and role of the government (Marais & Linstrom 2011:34). The above view is supported by Weinberg (2011), who claims that community media is a critical link to democracy, because it facilitates dialogues and empowers social change from grassroots level to greater heights. Sepotokele (2018) concurs that community media plays a crucial role in democracy and contributes to the transformation of the media, allows for a diversity of voices and unites communities. Rau at al (2008:107-108) also agrees that community media serves as an information and communication interface between the government and

the community. Community media also provides an interactive link between government and the community by informing the community on government plans and programmes meant to improve their way of life. The above views highlight the developmental role of community media, which is to empower communities it serves by providing information and educational content relevant to them, and by promoting democracy and diversity.

Berger (1996) states that, according to South Africa's National Community Media Forum (NCMF), community media is used by many to educate people about their rights and responsibilities, to hold the government to account and to unite communities. Carpentier & Doudaki (2014:415) asserts that community media fosters diversity, intercultural dialogue and tolerance. Community media also contributes to peace-building, conflict resolution and reconciliation. These are some of the many developmental roles that community media plays in society, which includes empowering communities through educating and informing them about their constitutional rights, the work of government and fostering democracy and unity.

Based on the above views from different scholars, the researcher is of the opinion that the developmental role of community media is to empower the communities it serves with information and knowledge. Community media is also used by community members as a tool to disseminate information among themselves. The developmental role of community media is also to grow income within communities, which now have the power to own and control their own community media and hire local people to work in community media organisations. Community media also provides skills and experience to communities in media and communication as well as in running community projects. This has had a positive impact on the economy of various communities that own a community media organisation. Those communities are generating revenue from their community projects and creating employment opportunities for their own people. The quality of life has improved through education and bridging the gap of illiteracy among the communities.

### **2.2.2 Independence of community media**

Community media is regarded as independent from the market and the state and uses the participation and pluralism mechanism (Carpentier & Doudaki 2014:417). The independence of community media is one of the characteristics used to differentiate between it and the mainstream media. According to the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (2005) workshop delegates, community media is identified as independent from corporate and government control (Carpentier & Doudaki 2014:415-416). Weinberg (2011) also concurs that community media must be independent from all the external forces, which includes government and the private sector, and serve marginalised people. Community media must be independent if it is to ensure that it can report impartially and hold the government to account.

However, there have been debates over the independence of community media. Mhagama (2004:86-88) claims that community media newspapers are not as independent as they are supposed to be because they fear external forces such as local government officials and politicians. In addition, Weinberg (2011) cites that the editorial independence of community media is severely impacted by individuals who control advertising budgets. This means that editorial content is biased in favour of advertisers while neglecting the role it should play in communities. Most community newspapers are failing to balance the ratio of news and advertisements in the newspaper; advertisements take priority over the content, which often brings into question the role of community media in influencing democracy and in development (Weinberg 2011). The lack of independence of community media raises questions about the freedom of community media and its right to exercise media freedom. The above arguments indicate that community media allows external forces to control its operations. This study will ascertain why there is no independence in community media and the effects it has on media content.

### **2.2.3 Participation in community media**

Participatory theory also plays a significant role in shaping community media. This theory, which is referred to as citizen-engaged practices, signifies a transformative moment in the history of news (Hatcher 2016). It emphasises the importance of giving the readers or audiences greater influence over media content. According to Hatcher (2016), it even requires citizen participation in the production of news. Democratic participant theory emphasises the importance of multiplicity of media, interaction and involvement, and horizontal communication. Mass media in the press and broadcasting sectors plays a significant role in the conduct of democratic politics (Mcquail 2006:151). The benefits are that there is a public flow of information about public events, government services and exposure of politicians. Mcquail (2006:151-152) argues, however, that despite the benefits of democratic participation, there are negative effects such as the domination by a few voices, which leads to the neglect of democratic communication roles. The new electronic media is now seen as a solution to the above problem, with its different ways of disseminating information that provides almost unlimited access for everyone (Mcquail 2006:151-152).

The participatory theory focuses on the interaction and involvement of different stakeholders and a diversity of views of communication. The mandate of community media is in line with participatory theory as it involves diverse opinions, bridging language, racial and cultural divides. The MDDA Act 14 of 2002 explains the importance of community participation in community media through encouraging ownership and control by members of the community (MDDA Act 14 of 2002 Section 3 (b) (i)) (MDDA [sa]). Community media allows minority groups in society to have access to the media. It also allows communities to be part of it through ownership and control, and reporting on issues of community interest.

According to Carpentier & Doudaki (2014:416), community media is referred to as participatory media. The community approach, which is one of the approaches used in the literature on the study of community media, is about the access and participation of the community (Carpentier & Doudaki 2014:417). Participation in community media means that community member's voices are heard, and it

empowers community members through valuing their skills and views. Rau et al (2008:105) cite that Howley (2005, p.2) defines community media as locally oriented media access which is dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity. Reader & Hatcher (2012:5) acknowledges that community newspapers have a close relationship with the people and a nearness to the people which the daily commercial newspapers do not have. Furthermore, Hatcher (2013:50) concurs that community media content is based on the citizens that give communities a voice and identity (Hatcher 2013:50).

Community participation in community media must also reflect the diversity of views found in communities. Marais & Linstrom (2011:37) comments that community media serves a particular community interest. According to Lauterer (2006:1), a community newspaper is a publication with a low circulation of under 50,000 that serves people in a particular geographic area with an emphasis on local content. In short, participation in community media involves a diversity of voices, allows members of the community to be active in issues affecting their daily lives and to use community media to communicate.

#### **2.2.4 Ownership and control of community media**

A community media organisation is a non-profit organisation that is owned and controlled by the community (Rau et al 2008:101). According to the MDDA Act 14 of 2002, community media is defined as any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where finance generated from the project is reinvested in it (Maphiri 2012:70). The European Parliament defines community media as, “media that are non-profit and owned by or accountable to the community that they seek to serve” (Carpentier & Doudaki 2014:417). By definition, then, a community media house is supposed to be controlled and owned by the community it serves.

Carpentier & Doudaki (2014:416) states that Tabing (2002:9) defines community media as “operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community”. According to South Africa’s National Community Media



Forum (NCMF) the defining characteristics of community media is that it is owned and controlled by community members, is not for profit-making, is accessible to its community, operates within a geographical area and is meant to serve disadvantaged communities (Berger 1996). In conclusion, the literature highlights that communities must have ownership and control of their community media and the role of community media is to address issues faced by the community. Community media is characterised by its non-profit nature and by being owned and controlled by the communities it serves.

### ***2.2.5 Sustainability in community media***

Community media in African countries is plagued by numerous challenges, which has had a negative impact on its sustainability. These challenges are a result of policies, regulations, lack of market research, inadequate training and an inability to sustain community media projects (Boafo (ed) 2000:17). Some of the challenges facing community media also include: the development and sustainment of relationships with their communities, development and sustainment of internal democracy, financial instability and vulnerability, community media being unaware of its democratic role, increasing concentration and homogenization caused by media landscapes being a threat to community media and loss of community media independence (Carpentier & Doudaki 2014:417-418).

Community newspapers are also facing severe challenges of a lack of understanding of the community media sector, infighting between board members, lack of advertising, and a failure to adhere to media ethics and codes of conduct for journalists (Sepokotele 2018). This indicates that there are many challenges that are hindering community media in executing its developmental mandate in society that affect its sustainability as a result. The environment in which community media operates is not conducive, due to a lack of resources (Weinberg 2011). It will therefore be difficult for community media to exercise its role of influencing democracy because of this lack of proper resources and financial backbone.

Community media depends solely on advertising income for sustainability. It is, however, difficult for them to source advertisements. Firstly, many of the communities they serve are underprivileged with few businesses able to advertise. Secondly, in most cases, corporate companies resist advertising in community media due to their small footprints and poor administration (Weinberg 2011). Lack of advertisements in community newspapers definitely affects their sustainability, as they cannot survive without revenue for printing and running their organisations.

Funding in general is a major challenge facing community media based on the overview analysis of the literature reviewed for this study. Boafo (ed) (2000:50) supports the view that funding is a constraint and further highlights some of the challenges which include: lack of qualified staff, lack of adequate training for staff and lack of resources. Lack of government support in terms of government departments advertising in community media is another hindrance in terms of sustainability of community media. According to Van Dyk (2017), the entities of the Department of Communications (DOC) spent a mere R1,3 million on advertising in community media in the 2016/17 financial year, while the main department, which had an advertising budget of R11, 9 million in the 2016/17 financial year, did not spend a single cent on advertising in community media (Van Dyk 2017). Furthermore, the MDDA, which was established with the purpose of promoting media development and diversity, is also facing a serious challenge of underfunding and understaffing; hence it is difficult for them to assist the community media with their daily needs (Weinberg 2011). Lack of funding, advertisements and support from the government and private sector severely undermines the sustainability of community media.

Lack of training, which implies lack of professionalism in journalism and broadcasting, is another challenge facing community media. The journalism skills of community media are weak, and less training is provided to its staff (Weinberg 2011). This view is also supported by Boafo (ed) (2000:21), who states that community media cannot afford to hire professionally qualified staff due to financial challenges. Even those wanting to start community media houses do not know how to go about doing so in many cases. Reader & Hatcher (2012:13) concur that community media organisations have a small number of staff members and in most

cases are run by one or two people, with the owner playing different roles. This highlights the shortage of staff due to lack of funding to pay their salaries.

Another challenge is the lack of market research. Bofo (ed) (2000:20) states that there is typically no research done before community media projects are initiated. It is, however, important that research be conducted to be able to determine the needs of the community as well as to identify potential advertisers to support and sustain the community media project. The research can also assist in identifying the risks that can affect the sustainability of community media. The establishment of community media projects without prior market research is a danger in itself.

There is also a lack of regulation and monitoring with regard to the ownership and control of community media. Weinberg (2011) states that there are opportunistic individuals who are using community media for their self-advancement; for example, those who use community members to acquire a license agreement to operate a community radio station. There is also lack of compliance and monitoring to ensure fairness and diversity of views in community media, which is also a problem. In addition, community print media is not protected from competition with large publishing companies such as Caxton Community Media, resulting in unfair competitive practices, as the giant media houses have many resources and ample funds (Weinberg 2011). This has resulted in many promising community newspapers being bought out by the media giants because they are struggling to sustain themselves.

In conclusion, based on the literature reviewed, there are severe challenges that are hindering the sustainability of community media. These challenges are insufficient or lack of funding; lack of resources, training, skills and professionalism, lack of monitoring on compliance; lack of support from the government and lack of market research before community projects are started. There is a need for these challenges to be addressed to enable community media to play a role in influencing democracy. This will also ensure that community media plays its developmental role in society.

### **2.2.6 Misconception of community media**

The study of community media has increased over the years and became relevant as an important sub-field of media and communication studies as well as social movement studies (Cammaerts 2016:1). There have been debates ranging from discussions about the roles that community media can play in both democratic and non-democratic societies. The attention given by academics has contributed to the increased democratic role of alternative and community media by policy-makers at both national and international levels of governance. The final Geneva Declaration of the United Nations, which was sponsored by the World Summit on the Information Society, is one of the major examples of a call for all relevant actors to provide active support to media based in local communities (Cammaerts 2016:1). In addition, the European Union in the European Parliament approved a report acknowledging the democratic and inclusive role of community media. The European Parliament recommended that Member States grant the same legal recognition to community media as is applied to commercial and public media (Cammaerts 2016:1). The invention of the internet has also made it possible for individuals and organisations to start up new forms of alternative media and community media. This is a result of the internet reducing distribution and production costs, as well as the constraints of time and space (Cammaerts 2016:1). This highlights the fact that different stakeholders across the globe believe that community media plays a democratic role in society.

Carpentier & Doudaki (2014:418) argue that community media does not provide solutions for all societal problems despite the roles that it plays in society, such as strengthening democracy, and contributing to peace-building, conflict resolution and reconciliation. This indicates a misconception of community media in that it is incorrect to state that community media can provide solutions to all the problems faced by communities. Berger (1996) questions the role of community media in society when he says, "Is it a matter of profits, participation, localisation, and ownership or communications policy?" This is also highlighted in Mozambique, where the government owns part of the Unesco community radio station; in Zambia, where an entrepreneur wants to start a community media project; and in Namibia, where a community radio station is trying to become a commercially self-sufficient station; while in South Africa community radios are trying to be more commercial

(Berger 1996). This question the developmental mandate of community media and indicates that community media is no longer executing its mandate; hence there is a misconception about the role played by community media in society.

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

This section explains how critical political economy informs the developmental mandate of community media. The relevance of this theory to the current study lies in the interplay of politics and economics in the field of community media. The relationship between ownership and control of the media and the content of community media newspapers needs to be explored. Sustainability is another crucial issue. Therefore, for this study, it is essential that critical political economy theory is analysed and linked to the developmental role of community media.

### **2.3.1 *Critical political economy theory***

The political economy theory originates from the Marxian tradition. The ownership, the control and the regulation of media industries involves political economy, which in turn is integrated within the overall political economy of society (Dahlgren 1995: 27-28). The political economy of television, which can also include other media industries, largely addresses issues of institutional finances and economic control. The political economy of media refers to media institutions as cultural industries in that media operates like industries and the only difference is that the goods that the media produces are images and words with which people can make sense of the world (Dahlgren 1995:27-28). The study of political economy can be traced from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its critique in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wasko (2005:25-26) cites that Adam Smith defined political economy as the study of wealth and was concerned about how mankind arranges the allocation of scarce resources with a view toward satisfying certain needs and not others. Smith (1776) further states that political economy focuses on the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of wealth and the consequences for the welfare of individuals and society (Wasko 2005:25-26). Vincent Mosco also explains the political economy of communication as, "The study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually

constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources.” Mosco emphasises the fact that political economy is about survival and control in terms of the society in order to produce what is necessary to survive, and about maintaining order to meet societal goals (Wasko 2005:26).

Critical political economy theory is an extension of political economy theory, which became distinctive and recognised in the 1960s. It was introduced at the University of Illinois, by Dallas Smythe and then Herbert Schiller. In the 1970s it emerged during the period of neo-Marxist influence within the humanities and social sciences, which was where media, communications and cultural studies were located at the time. Critical political economy approach viewed media houses as industries which produce and distribute commodities. This theory became institutionalised during the 1980s and in the 1990s communications scholarship moved further from critical to digital media (Hardy 2014:47-56).

Vincent Masco highlights four central characteristics of critical political economy which are: social change and history, social totality, moral philosophy and praxis. Social change and history mean that this theory continues its tradition of classic theorists and capitalism, which is the growth of monopoly capital. Social totality means that political economy explores the relationship among commodities, institutions, social relations and hegemony. Moral philosophy means that critical political economy also follows the classical theorists’ emphasis on moral philosophy. Praxis means that political economists attempt to transcend the difference between research and policy, positioning their work towards actual social change and practice (Wasko 2005:26-27).

According to Dahlgren (1995: 27-28), the critical political economy involves the sets of social relations and power. These sets of social relations include the sociocultural, material and political hierarchies among the audiences. It is also concerned about access of various forms of the media output within a population. This means that this theory will help to ascertain whether the residents of Alexandria, where these two community newspapers used as case studies are operating, have access to copies of the newspaper. According to Hardy (2014: 28-30), critical political economy of media focuses on how the politics and economics of media industries affects the

production, distribution and the interpretations of the information that has been disseminated. This theory will help this study to investigate the operations, production, and distribution of the two community newspapers: *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*. The political critical economy will help to determine the political and economic issues that affect the production and distribution of these community newspapers amongst the communities. Some of the economic issues discussed in the literature include: the lack of funding, resources and independence of community media.

There are three core themes of critical political economy theory in media which are: production, content and audience. This theory looks at the conditions that influence the production in the media such as ownership, finance, governance and regulation (Hardy 2014: 31-32). The theory is relevant to this study, as it will also look at the ownership and control of these two community newspapers. The journalist, editors, management and the readers were interviewed to determine their influence in these newspapers. In terms of the content this theory examines how the media serves to sustain the interests of the powerful (Hardy 2014: 32). In terms of audiences, the critical political theory assumes that audiences are commodified. This relates to whether the community media is accountable to its audiences, which this study will also investigate. A comparative study of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*, focusing on their content, will determine whether they actually appeal to the interests of the community.

Critical political economy theory is also concerned with the unequal distribution of power which is sustained and reproduced (Hardy 2014:27). The theory assumes that different ways of organising and financing communications have implications for the nature of media content. The theory is influenced by Marxist political economy theory, which is about capitalism, production, commodification, class divisions and struggles (Hardy 2014:27). It is also influenced by the works of Karl Marx in terms of understanding power, domination and inequality (Hardy 2014: 27-29). Critical political economy theory will help to understand the impact that the generation of revenue for community media has on the content of the newspapers.

Political economy theory focuses on the relationship between the economic structure, dynamics of media industries and the ideological content of the media. The media institutions are considered as the economic system which is linked to the political system. This leads to lack of media independence, concentration of large markets and biased political news reporting (Mcquail 2010:96). The media contents and audiences are commodified, the ownership and control of the media is concentrated in fewer hands and access to benefits of communication are unequally distributed (Mcquail 2010:97). The main strength of this theory is its capacity for making empirically testable propositions about market determinations (Mcquail 2010:96). This theory is best suited for this study because it emphasises the fact that ownership and power of the media has implications for the content. This study seeks to investigate whether community media print is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society, and the issue of power and ownership will help to determine whether the community media is fulfilling its developmental mandate. Lee (2011) supports the above view, citing that critical political economy theory argues that it is crucial to examine power. This is important in this study as it seeks to ascertain the role played by those in power who control the production and the advertising budgets for the community newspapers in ensuring that it fulfils its developmental mandate.

The critical political theory has been criticised for reductionism and economism of the media (Hardy 2014:47). Society, however, reaches the same conclusions as those applying critical political theory. The concern that is raised by society is a claim that community media is no longer catering for historically disadvantaged communities. The claim is that poor communities are denied media participation and community media is now operated like commercial media which aims at profit-making. This study has used this theory to ascertain whether these claims are true.



## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter of the study is based on two sections: literature review and theoretical frameworks. Literature review is based on the following themes: developmental role of community media, independence of community media, participation in community media, ownership and control of community media, sustainability in community media and misconception of community media. These themes are discussed in detail. Also highlighted are different definitions of community media and the crucial roles which community media plays in society which include uniting communities; strengthening democracy; resolving conflict; reconciliation; bridging cultural, language and racial divides and fostering social cohesion. Through these themes the challenges faced by community media are also highlighted. These include lack of funding, lack of resources and training, and failure to perform its developmental mandate in society. Inadequate staffing of community media as well as the lack of regulation to ensure that there is no unfair competition among community media are some of the challenges highlighted.

The second section of this chapter is a discussion of the critical political economy theory as one of the theories that informs this investigation into whether or not community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society, using a comparative study of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. The discussion outlines how the critical political economy helps this study, such as identifying how ownership and control of community media has impact on the media content. This theory explains the role played by those in power who control the production of community newspapers and how finance impacts on media content.

## **3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct this research, identifying the participants and describing how the research unfolded. The research approach used in this study is qualitative research design. There will be a discussion on this, as well as on the methods of population and sampling. This chapter will also look at the methods that were used for data collection and data analysis. In addition, validity and reliability issues of qualitative research and ethical issues associated with data collection will be dealt with in detail here.

### **3.2 Research design**

The interpretive paradigm is adopted for this study, which aims to investigate whether community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society using a comparative study of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. This is appropriate, because the interpretive paradigm is concerned with subjective meanings. It also seeks to recognise the individual's interpretation and understanding of social phenomena. Its goal is to explore individuals' opinions, share their meanings and develop insights about what is being investigated (Shah & Al Bargi 2013: 256-257). In short, interpretive paradigm thinking focuses on the understanding of the individual and their interpretation of the world.

There are four important aspects of the interpretive paradigm. Firstly, it assumes a subjectivist epistemology, which means that the researcher creates meaning out of the data that has been gathered through their own thinking. In other words, the cognitive processing of data is informed by the researcher's interactions with participants. Secondly, the interpretive paradigm assumes a relativist ontology, which means that the situation being studied has multiple realities and can be explored and understood through interactions between the researcher and the subjects of the research, including the research participants. Thirdly, the interpretive paradigm assumes a naturalist methodology, which means that the researcher uses the data gathered during the research and acts as a participant observer. Fourthly,

the interpretive paradigm assumes a balanced axiology, which means that the research outcomes will reflect the values of the researcher in terms of presenting a balanced findings report (Kivunja 2017: 33-34).

The interpretive paradigm is the best one for this study, as it investigates the views of differing role-players. This study will explore individuals' perspectives on the developmental role of two community media organisations, namely: *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* newspapers. Data gathered will be used by the researcher to inform the conclusion. Literature on the subject will be considered to confirm the researcher's cognitive processing. Also evaluated will be interaction between the researcher and the participants to understand their views on whether community media is fulfilling its developmental role in society.

### **3.3 Research approach**

The research approach that was used for this study is the qualitative research method. This focuses on the meanings of experiences by exploring how people define, describe and make sense of their experiences. Qualitative research assumes that knowledge is constructed through communication and interaction. The purpose of qualitative research is descriptive, and its goal is to understand the perspective of a research participant (Vanderstoep & Johnston 2009:165-167). Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of how a certain organisation functions and how certain issues affect the behaviour of the participants (De Franzo 2011). This research method suits this study, which is an investigation of two different community newspapers to determine how they operate and whether or not they are fulfilling their developmental mandate in society.

Keyton (2011: 69) points out the advantages of qualitative research. Firstly, through carefully planned observation, the researcher captures the information that research participants may not be able to see. Secondly, qualitative research can provide information for those who are unable or unwilling to speak for themselves. Thirdly, this research method can supplement information obtained from quantitative research (Keyton 2011: 69). These advantages speak to the nature of this study.

Like many other research methods, however, qualitative research has limitations. Keyton (2011: 69-70) cites four limitations of qualitative research. Firstly, the communication environment is not always accessible for the researchers. Secondly, people may change their behaviour while being observed, and the information that the researcher receives and what he or she is seeing may not occur when he or she is not there. Thirdly, the researcher observes and interprets things the way he or she understands them. Fourthly, qualitative research is time-consuming and therefore limits the time that the researcher has to take in observing the situation (Keyton 2011: 69-70). All these limitations can, however, be overcome.

The qualitative research methods used for data collection for this study are focus groups, content analysis, field interviews and case studies. The researcher's content analysis of the August 2018 editions of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* are included. Data gathered from the research participants by means of interviews and participatory observation methods is evaluated; the views of the management or owners of the newspapers, the editors, journalists, marketing personnel, distribution team and advertisers – as well as Alexandra residents – are all gained through interviews. The above research methods are all used to gather data, to understand and observe the participants' views.

### **3.4 Population and sampling**

#### **3.4.1 Population**

The term "population" refers to all the existing members of the group that is being studied and includes objects as well as people. In this study the population centres around the two community newspapers, *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*. They have population parameters in common which are: they are distributed free of charge, readers do not pay any money to access the newspapers, they are distributed weekly in Alexandra Township, they serve the same community (*Alex News* [sa] & *Greater Alex Today* [sa]). The identity of the parameters the two newspapers do not have in common will emerge as the study progresses. *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* will, however, remain at the centre of the study.

The sampling frame or target population is described by Coolicon (2004:34-35) as the population from which we will sample and is more specific to the main aim of the study. Bernard & Whitley (2002:391) cites that the target population is the group of people that the researcher wants the results of the research to apply to. In this study, the target population is the management team of the newspapers, which includes the editors, journalists, advertising and marketing personnel, distribution personnel; and the readers of these two newspapers, who are community members of Alexandra Township. The accessible population are the community members of Alexandra Township who can easily be accessed for interviews and focus groups. The researcher believes that the views of this target population will be sufficient to inform the conclusions of this study.

### **3.4.2 Sampling**

According to Maree & Van Der Westhuizen (2009: 23), a sample consists of the research participants. This view is supported by Coolicon (2004:21), who cites that samples are people that the researcher is going to work with, although sometimes samples are materials and not always people directly. In this study there are three kinds of research participants. Firstly, the management team and staff of the two newspapers are chosen because they are involved in the day-to-day running of these newspapers, and because they understand their readers and work with them. This group includes the editors, journalists, advertising and distribution personnel of the two newspapers. The second group of research participants are the community members of Alexandra, who read the newspapers and also generate stories for them. The third group of research participants are the advertisers, as they contribute to the revenue and sustainability of the newspapers.

In this investigation into whether or not community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society, the method used to draw the sample is purposive sampling, which is a kind of nonprobability sampling. Purposeful samples consist of people who share the same attribute and are designed to include equal representation of groups who may not be equally represented in society (Vanderstoep & Johnston 2009:187-188). Keyton (2011:268) cites that purposive sampling is used in qualitative research designs particularly when the researcher

selects people or other sampling units. In this case a researcher selects either a person or people or a site that he or she thinks is typical of the communication investigated. Purposive sampling depends on the researcher's knowledge of what is typical of a population to avoid bias (Keyton 2011:132). In addition, Bernard & Whitley (2002:395) cites that in purposive sampling, the researcher uses his or her judgement to select participants of the sample based on the objectives of the research. This type of sampling is used in case study research to investigate typical cases.

In this study, the Alexandria residents who receive *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* are interviewed in order to understand their opinions on whether these two community media players are developing their communities. The management team of these two newspapers are also participants, as they outline their developmental contribution to the community of Alexandria and highlight the challenges that are hindering their efforts in fulfilling their developmental mandate. In order to ascertain whether ownership and control has an impact on the developmental mandate played by community print media in society the researcher has selected community newspapers owned by different organisations. An investigation can then be conducted into the structure and functioning of both *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*. The editors, journalists, marketing staff, advertisers and residents are selected by the researcher to participate in the study. All these individuals chosen by the researcher have extensive knowledge of the operations of the newspapers and understand its role.

Keyton (2011:123-124) highlights that the way the sample is selected is important, because it affects the degree to which the results are generalizable. Generalizability is defined as the extent to which conclusions developed from data collected from a sample can be extended to the population. A poorly defined population and non-representative sample raises concerns about generalizability. The generalization of results is strengthened when the researcher uses replication such as literal replication, operational replication, and constructive replication (Keyton 2011:123-124). In short, generalization is what makes a case study relevant in a broader context.

Coolican (2004:34-35) cites, in fact, that the rationale of a study is when a representative sample is generalized. The sample for this study can be generalized if other researchers have done the same investigation and found the same results as the ones that were obtained in this study. It is the view of the researcher that some of the research conducted on community print media playing its developmental role in society should be looked at to check how and why their results might agree with this research. Generalization will also depend on the published research history about the developmental role of community media in society, particularly community newspapers. This will be essential to the credibility of this study.

### **3.5 Data collection**

#### **3.5.1 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis is generally described as an individual or group of people that participate in the study from whom the researcher collects information about their opinions, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about the issue that is being investigated. The units of analysis, however, are not always people, but can also be artefacts (Du Plooy 2001:134). The objective of the study is to investigate whether community media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society. A comparison of two community newspapers, *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*, is used. In this case the units of analysis are both artefacts and people. The artefacts are the two community newspapers: *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*. Research participants are the managers or owners of the newspaper, editors, journalists, marketing personnel, the distribution teams and Alexandra residents. The researcher's aim is to get first-hand information on how these two community newspapers operate by engaging with Alexandra residents to understand their views and attitudes, and what motivates them to read the two newspapers.

### **3.6 Methods of data collection**

In this study, the qualitative research method is used to understand how these two newspapers operate and the challenges that they are faced with on a daily basis.

Interviews with the management team, editors and journalists of the two newspapers are used to ascertain their various viewpoints. In terms of content analysis, copies of the newspapers allow the content, advertisements and the ratio between advertisements and content to be checked. Focus groups are used to collect data from the readers of the two newspapers, who are students, youth, community members and stakeholders. The primary data is derived from interviews and focus groups and, while the secondary data is obtained from actual editions of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* and through a case study.

### **3.6.1 Field interviewing**

Keyton (2011:284) defines field interviewing as a semi-direct form of conversation aimed at uncovering the participant's point of view. In this case the interviewer is the researcher who understands the topic being investigated but needs to get answers to the research question from the interviewees, who are the research participants. Qualitative interviews focus on understanding the underlying meaning of information, and the opinions and interests of the participants. They explore the participant's feelings, emotions and experiences (Brennen 2013: 28). In this study, face-to-face interviews are conducted with the participants in order to understand and observe the participant's views on the role played by these two community newspapers in their township. The researcher favours face-to-face interviews in order to record events and interactions that need to be directly observed, to gain an understanding of the communication process from the participant's viewpoint, to develop a relationship between the researcher and the participant and to allow the researcher to verify data obtained from other sources and inquire about the events that occurred in the past (Keyton 2011:284).

This study follows the interview process, which entails conceptualising the enquiry and designing the research questions. Unstructured interviews are used, with the objectives of obtaining insight and in-depth information about the subject being investigated. This method suits this study in that it enables editors to discuss the challenges that they are faced with in running their community newspapers. They also feel free to provide the researcher with some information that is not discussed in



the public sphere. According to Du Plooy (2001:178), unstructured interviews give participants freedom to respond to questions, as they create an atmosphere of trust.

It is also important that interview participants are selected according to their specialised knowledge in the topic being investigated (Keyton 2011:287). In this study the participants are selected from the *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* teams, namely: the directors, editors, journalists, marketing and advertising team, distribution team and advertisers. It is because these selected participants have extensive knowledge of running community newspapers that they are aware of their role in society. They are also able to highlight the challenges faced by their community newspapers that are hindering them from fulfilling their mandate. Notes and recordings of the answers to the researcher's interview questions with the participants from each newspaper will prove invaluable to this study, as it is the researcher's view that data collected from these two newspapers' teams will assist in resolving the problem, as challenges will be highlighted that can then be solved.

### **3.6.2. Focus groups**

Focus groups are facilitator-led group discussions used to collect data from groups of participants on certain topics (Keyton 2011:292). They are important in that they allow the researcher to study deliberations, dialogue and democratic practice in the field of communication. They are also intended to stimulate participants' conversations (Keyton 2011:292). In addition, focus groups are often used to identify participants' preferences, attitudes, and beliefs (Brennen 2013: 59). This method is used in collecting data from the community of Alexandra who are the readers of the *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. The researcher, as the facilitator of the focus groups in this study, is the one who plans the focus group research questions and topics, and outlines the focus of the investigation, which is to ascertain whether or not community media is fulfilling its developmental mandate, using a comparison of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers.

The researcher also has to select the participants of the focus groups. This is done here through purposive sampling, with only those the researcher believes to have knowledge on the subject being selected. The participants are also selected on the

basis of age, education, and gender. For each focus group, participants with similar characteristics are chosen. They are then briefed on the objective of the study and informed-consent forms are completed between the researcher and the participants. The participants are informed of the date, time, venue and duration of their focus groups. Two days before the actual date of the focus groups the researcher must contact them to remind them that their focus group will be meeting (Keyton 2011:294). In this way, the researcher is able to obtain representative views of various demographic groups.

The size of focus groups should range from 5 to 10 participants to make it easy for facilitators to control them. The general rule is to schedule three to five focus groups for a research study (Keyton 2011:294). In this study the participants of the three focus groups are all residents of Alexandra Township. The first focus group is for youth enrolled in tertiary education institutions, both employed and unemployed, and the aim here is to understand their views on the community newspapers and what contributions they are making to their township. The second focus group is for learners in secondary schools, and its objective is to find out what they value about the newspapers. The third focus group consists of adults, both male and female, and its purpose is to reveal their views in general. The researcher believes that these focus groups will provide extensive information that will help identify the gaps within community newspapers.

### **3.6.3 Content analysis**

Content analysis focuses on, and explains, what the material that is being studied contains, without exploring how it affects people exposed to it (Berger 2016:273). It is used to analyse physical units such as newspapers. A content analysis method is therefore used to analyse the newspaper contents of both *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. The August 2018 editions of these newspapers (seven in total) are analysed. This type of analysis will help to explain these newspapers' content, advertisements, designs and websites. The data collected will answer the question of whether these newspapers are fulfilling their developmental mandate in society.

### **3.6.4 Case study**

The case study technique is mostly used to answer the “how” and “why” questions in a research project. According to Díaz Andrade (2009), Yin (2003:13) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” A case study is conducted in a natural setting and aimed at understanding the nature of current processes in order to allow the researcher to understand the situation under investigation (Díaz Andrade 2009). The advantage of a case study is its naturalism, in that people are studied in their natural environments while undergoing the natural experiences of their daily lives (Bernard & Whitley 2002:37). The naturalism and the depth of case study give the researcher a subjective feel for the situation under study which is often lacking in report researches that have been conducted using other strategies. A case study also allows the researcher to investigate a rarely occurring phenomenon and can lead to the discovery of overlooked behaviours. In addition, this method can allow scientists to gain a new point of view of the situation under investigation (Bernard & Whitley 2002:38). In short, case studies are real-life examples that allow for unique research insights.

A case study best explains the human interaction in a social setting. In an interpretive case study, the researcher is directly involved and engages with the participants. The advantages are that the researcher gains a deep insight into the problem under investigation, which makes this technique suitable for this study, as the researcher must understand the developmental role played by these two community newspapers. There are also limitations to the case study technique, because the researcher has no control over the situation in which the study takes place and is highly vulnerable to researcher bias (Bernard & Whitley 2002:39). The advantages, however, far outweigh the limitations, which can be overcome.

### 3.7 Data analysis

According to Keyton (2011: 305) data analysis is the process of moving from raw data to evidence-based interpretation. It is about creating order through structuring and interpreting the collected data. Lindlof & Taylor (2011- 243) cite that in data analysis the researcher hopes to ensure the following: data management, data reduction and conceptual development. In order to analyse data, the researcher has to sort the data to reduce it to a meaningful representation and multiple plausible interpretations and then interpret it. This process involves analysis, in which raw data is labelled and broken down into themes; and interpretation, in which the researcher gives meanings to the themes (Keyton 2001: 306). The researcher has to capture his or her reactions and interactions with people. Analytical memos are used to separate the researcher's analysis from data collection and categorize data into meaningful units (Keyton 2011: 306). There are two perspectives for analysing qualitative data: grounded theory and thematic analysis. Grounded theory is defined as an iterative process that guides a researcher through identifying categories and their relationships between each other. Thematic analysis of data is based on the following criteria: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (Keyton 2011: 317).

In this study the researcher considers grounded theory to be a suitable technique to analyse the data gathered. Grounded theory, which is also referred to as the constant-comparative method, is based on the concept that theory is grounded in the relationship between data and the categories into which they are coded; and that the codes and categories can be changed as the researchers compares new categories to existing ones while analysing the data (Keyton 2011: 311). There are steps to be followed when using this technique: the researcher must become familiar with the data, code the data, identify the categories that have emerged from the data and compare them. Lindlof & Taylor (2011- 250-252) support the above view, highlighting three steps of grounded theory, which are: coding of categories of data, integration and dimensionalization. The process of integration involves reshaping of categories to produce a deeper meaning. Dimensionalization is the final step in the process of coding, categorization and conceptual development.

### 3.8 Qualitative research

In qualitative research, researchers are key, playing multiple roles for the duration of a study. They are used to study the performance, process and practice of communication (Keyton 2011: 261). In this study the researcher's role is to facilitate the research process in focus groups and to interact with the participants but not to take a central role in the group that is being observed (Keyton 2011: 261-262). Some of the other many functions of the researcher in this study are to observe participants, prepare and structure interviews, schedule interviews, conduct interviews, prepare focus group interviews, facilitate focus group interviews and analyse data (Maree & Westhuizen 2019:37). Mechanisms must be put in place, therefore, to ensure the accuracy of the researcher.

One mechanism that holds the researcher to account is reflexivity. This refers to a continual process of monitoring the research process to minimise errors (Du Plooy 2001:190). In this study reflexivity will be used as the researcher takes care to monitor the research process continually during data collection to avoid errors. Furthermore, Lindlof & Taylor (2011- 274) cite that triangulation involves a comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to the subject of study. It is the researcher's view that if more methods of research produce similar results, then validation is enhanced. The data collected from different research methods selected by the researcher such as content analysis, focus groups and field interviews will therefore be compared.

In conclusion, the purpose of using qualitative research in this study is to create opportunities to engage with the residents of Alexandra and the editorial teams of the two newspapers to ascertain their views and attitudes towards community newspapers. The newspapers being investigated are operating in Alexandra Township. *Alex News* offices, however, are based in Craighall Park while *Greater Alex Today* offices are based in Alexandra (Alex News [sa] & Greater Alex Today [sa]). Interviewing the newspaper's managers or owners, editors, journalists, marketing personnel and distribution teams at their offices, then, will allow for some interesting ethnographic observations. Conducting the focus groups in Alexandra

Township will put the Alexandra residents, who are the research participants, at their ease. These measures will improve the quality of the research.

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

There are many ethical issues that are associated with data collection and it is the responsibility of the researcher to conduct the research ethically. Bernard & Whitley (2002:59-60) cite that the responsibility for ethical research conduct is vested in the researcher and the institution sponsoring the research. It is therefore the duty of the researcher to consider the ethical aspects of the research they intend to do and to train any assistants on ethical conduct (Bernard & Whitley 2002:59-60). There are bodies such as the Institutional Review Board that is tasked with examining proposed research projects to ensure that they adhere to strictly ethical standards. In this section, therefore, the various aspects of ethical research conduct are carefully examined.

According to Bernard & Whitley (2002:77), the researcher has an obligation to treat the participants with respect as most participants take part voluntarily without receiving monetary compensation. There should be an avoidance of harm as some research methods pose risks to participants. It is the responsibility of the researcher to screen participants for known risk factors and monitor participants during the research for any signs of negative effects (Bernard & Whitley 2002:77). To address this issue, the researcher must establish screening procedures to ensure that people at special risk do not participate in the research (Bernard & Whitley 2002:77). In short, research participants are volunteers who should not be exposed to risk of any sort.

Honouring retractions of consent is another ethical issue associated with collection of data. Research participants have the right to withdraw their consent even after the research project has commenced according to the principles of voluntary participation and informed consent (Bernard & Whitley 2002:80). The researchers may not even persuade a participant who has withdrawn from a research project to continue. To address this issue the researcher must engage with the participant who is showing signs of unwillingness and remind them that they have the right to

withdraw from the research. The researcher must be transparent with the participants and inform them about their rights to refuse to participate and to withdraw in order to give them the choice of making an informed decision (Bernard & Whitley 2002:80). It is vital that those who participate do so willingly at all times.

There are also many ethical obligations to be followed by the researcher even after collecting data from the participants. These ethical obligations include alleviating adverse effects, educating participants about the study, explaining any deception that was used and maintaining the confidentiality of the data collected (Bernard & Whitley 2002:81). In terms of alleviating adverse effects, some procedures used in research prompt adverse effects in the participants. To address this, the researcher must conduct a post-experimental interview as a form of debriefing, to educate the participant about the research, pointing out any deception that might have been used during the collection of data from the participants. Debriefing is the ethical obligation of providing the participant with full information about the research to relieve their anxieties over any negative behaviour the research may have induced (Bernard & Whitley 2002:81-83). Furthermore, Keyton (2011:93) cites that debriefing gives the researcher an opportunity to interact with the participants after collecting data. The participants will also have an opportunity to ask the researcher questions and react to the research.

Confidentiality and protection of data is another ethical obligation. Research participants have the right to personal privacy, which the researcher must safeguard by maintaining the confidentiality of the information received. In many cases the participants reveal personal information to the researcher that they do not want to be exposed to the public (Bernard & Whitley 2002:84-86). There is therefore a need to examine the means of protecting confidentiality and the legal status of research data. Most importantly, the researcher must refrain from recording the identity of the people who provided the information in case the data records are lost or stolen and the information is used to expose and embarrass the participants (Bernard & Whitley 2002:84-86). In addition, the researcher must make provision for anonymity to protect the participant who might provide information that could make the participant liable to criminal prosecution (Bernard & Whitley 2002:86). Keyton (2011:90-93)

supports the above view, highlighting that the researcher must not attach any information that could link the participants to the data.



### 3.10 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on outlining the research strategy used to investigate whether community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate, using a comparison study of two community newspapers in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg. The newspapers to be investigated are *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. In this study, qualitative research design is used. The target population of this study is identified as the editors, journalists, advertising and marketing personnel, distribution personnel and the readers of these two newspapers who are community members of Alexandra Township. The accessible population are the community members of Alexandra Township who are the readers. The nonprobability sampling type called purposive sampling is used to draw the sample for this study.

The methods used for data collection are focus groups, content analysis, field interviews and case study. The data analysis technique used is grounded theory. Lastly, the ethical issues associated with collection of data are also discussed, such as avoidance of harm, the right of research participants to withdraw consent from the research after it has commenced, and confidentiality and protection of data. The ways of addressing these ethical obligations are also discussed in detail in this chapter.

## **4 CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings gathered from various sources about *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. A comparative study of the two community newspapers is used in this empirical enquiry which aims to find out if community newspapers are fulfilling their developmental mandate in society. The method used to collect data is the qualitative research one and is done by means of: interviews, focus groups and content analysis. The findings in this chapter are presented according to five variables which are interlinked, namely: funding, ownership and control, training and skills, staffing and access to resources. These five findings variables are derived from the literature reviewed for this study and supported by information gathered when collecting data.

### **4.2 Findings**

#### **4.2.1 Funding**

Funding is a major challenge for community newspapers. The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not funded and is solely dependent on advertisements for survival. In the interview with founder and acting editor of *Greater Alex Today*, John Mgodlo, he emphasises the fact that it is difficult to acquire funding. Although he has applied for funding several times from the MDDA and the private sector, he has not yet been considered. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two supports the claim of the *Greater Alex Today* acting editor that it is difficult for community media to get funding from the MDDA. Weinberg (2011) points out that MDDA is underfunded and understaffed; hence it is difficult to assist all the community media organisations across the country with funding and their daily needs.

Even community co-operatives find it easier to access funding than community media projects. According to Mgodlo, the only time *Greater Alex Today* received funding was when it was registered under a co-operative before the members went

their separate ways. It was then that the community newspaper qualified for once-off funding from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) under the Co-operative Incentive Scheme (CIS) for primary co-operatives. According to Mgogodlo, “The money was not enough to sustain the newspaper. We managed to print for a few months and to buy small equipment such as laptops and a small printer and pay employees’ salaries.” Although the funding helped, a great deal more is needed to sustain this community newspaper.

In the month of August 2018, the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper published only two editions instead of five, because there was no money for printing more. “Operating a community newspaper without funding is stressful. I am failing to print my newspaper weekly as it is supposed to be due to a lack of funding. I depend solely on advertisements to pay for the printing costs, salaries and to sustain the newspaper. It is difficult also to get advertisers to place adverts in the newspaper because of the small footprint that our newspaper is covering. There are times where we don’t print because we don’t have adverts to place in the paper,” explains Mgogodlo.

Newspaper editions for June and July of 2018 were also printed fortnightly because of financial constraints, because he is “struggling to source adverts to sustain the printing costs,” points out Mgogodlo. The acting editor’s claim is supported by the two editions of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper for the month of August which are for 15 - 21 August 2018 and 29 August - 4 September 2018, the front pages of which are in Appendix B. The fact that this newspaper is failing to print weekly shows the negative impact that a lack of funding has on community print media.

The shortage of funds for printing furthermore affects the distribution of the newspaper. According to most of the learners in the focus group discussion, there is no consistency in the distribution of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper. Records of the focus group discussion show doubt in the very existence of *Greater Alex Today* expressed by some of the learners. In fact, the discussion even includes a debate among learners with some claiming there is no consistency in the distribution of the newspaper and others saying that they last saw the newspaper three months previously, and that it might have shut down. The words of a male learner from East Bank High School are: “I don’t think this newspaper still exists; I last saw the newspaper at Alex Mall about three months ago.” The opinion of a female learner

from Realogile Secondary School is: “There is no consistency in the distribution of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper.” Lack of funding, therefore, makes it very difficult for community print media to achieve consistent distribution of copies.

Inconsistent distribution of copies, together with unavailability of journalists, also spoils the credibility of community print media. The complaint of a female learner from Realogile Secondary is: “We invite the editor of this newspaper to our school to cover our events and sometimes they do come but our stories are not published.” According to a male youth, “We only have one community newspaper in this township which is Alex News and it is distributed weekly. The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not consistent and accessible.” Another female participant’s argument is: “This newspaper is not distributed regularly and if the owner is struggling, he must shut down the newspaper, as it is not benefiting the residents of Alexandra.” This clearly indicates a lack of consistency in publishing and that the newspaper is facing a severe financial challenge.

Paying salaries and hiring professional staff is also a battle due to financial constraints. Mgogodlo says some of the journalists and marketing staff took him to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) demanding the salaries that he had failed to pay them for more than three months. He lost the case and the judgement declared that he must pay all his employees for the months they had worked. The acting editor “had to borrow money from [his] family and relatives to pay the money owed to [his] employees for salaries.” According to a freelance journalist for *Greater Alex Today* who wanted to remain anonymous, “We always get paid two to three months late. Mgogodlo tells us that there is no money. The weekly newspaper is sometimes printed per fortnight or once a month. We are also distributing 10 000 copies per edition instead of 30 000 and some people within the community don’t receive the newspaper.” Lack of funding, therefore, impacts severely on the salaries of the employees and staff of *Greater Alex Today*.

In terms of funding, the situation at *Alex News* is very different. This community newspaper is funded by Caxton and has no financial constraints. According to an interview with Siphiso Siso, the editor of *Alex News*, the newspaper is consistent with their publishing dates and has never missed an edition. They also have no

challenges paying staff their salaries, and the salaries are market related. This is evident through their month of August 2018 newspaper editions, of which they did not miss any weekly publication. In that month, *Alex News* published five editions which are: week ending 3 August 2018, week ending 10 August 2018, week ending 17 August 2018, week ending 24 August 2018 and week ending 31 August 2018. The front-page copies of *Alex News* for its August 2018 editions are attached in Appendix A.

According to Siso, the reason why *Alex News* is not experiencing any financial challenges and is able to print consistently is that the newspaper is owned by media giant Caxton, which owns many community newspapers, magazines, and a national daily newspaper. This claim is supported by data from *Alex News* and Caxton website, which mentions the owners of *Alex News*. This assertion is also supported by most of the focus group participants, who claim that they have access to *Alex News* every week. According to a male participant, "I read *Alex News* because it is delivered in our yard letterbox every Thursday. This newspaper informs us about what is happening around Alex and what is intended to be done by the municipality. The government is using this newspaper to communicate with us; hence it is very essential for us residents to read it." Reliable funding means *Alex News* editions are printed regularly and on time.

*Greater Alex Today*, however, has great difficulties getting funding and advertisements, as the founder points out in his interview. This claim is supported by literature reviewed in Chapter Two, where Bofo (ed) (2000:50) claims that funding is a major constraint for community media. Lack of funding also has a negative impact on the number of copies printed, as well as the number of editions. *Greater Alex Today* is unable to reach its goal of printing 30 000 copies per week and currently prints only about 10 000 copies because there is no money for printing more. Lack of funding means that *Greater Alex Today* is not able to print weekly or achieve its circulation goals.

Furthermore, *Greater Alex Today* has to compete with *Alex News* for advertisements, which is difficult because the latter is owned by Caxton, which has all the necessary resources, and thus a big footprint also. "*Alex News* often get first

preference in terms of advertisements. I am struggling to source adverts. I rely on government and small adverts but it's not enough to run the newspaper," explains Mgogodlo. Weinberg (2011) concurs that community media depends on advertising income for sustainability and that it is difficult for community media to source advertisements because some the communities are underprivileged with few businesses in the community that are able to advertise. In most cases, corporate companies resist advertising in community media due to their small footprints. There is also a lack of government support in terms of government departments advertising in community media (Weinberg 2011). This view is supported by the content analysis of these two newspapers published in the month of August 2018. *Alex News* has more advertisements than *Greater Alex Today*. *Alex News* has dedicated a full page (page six) for classified advertisements and carries inserted advertisements as well, while *Greater Alex Today* does not have a classified advertisements page, and their small advertisements are scattered all over the newspaper. Without funding, community newspapers cannot achieve a big footprint, without which it is difficult to attract sufficient advertising.

Although *Alex News* is full of inserted advertisements, there is a complaint that the actual newspaper is thin. The learner focus group discussion indicates that most Alexandra learners are familiar with *Alex News*; the complaint, however, is that the newspaper has only eight pages. "I read *Alex News* every week; however, the paper is thin - there are not enough stories. Some of the stories are not published on the newspaper but on the website," are the words of a male learner from East Bank High School. This clearly indicates that *Alex News* is not struggling to source advertisements in the same way as *Greater Alex Today* is.

*Alex News* editor Siphiso Siso says 40 000 copies of his newspaper are distributed weekly on a Thursday, with 20 000 copies going to the old part of Alexandra Township while the other 20 000 go to the new development houses and malls. The content ratio is 60% editorial and 40% advertising, but he points out that there are not enough advertisements to print all the stories. "Our newspaper is eight pages because we do not have enough adverts to support the publication," says Siso. Some of the stories that are not published in the newspaper are published online on the newspaper's website instead. According to Siso, he has built the *Alex News*

brand and has a good relationship with the community of Alexandra. “We are no longer running up and down for stories - the community of Alexandra contacts us for news stories,” he says. *Alex News*, then, is a sustainable community paper, but only as an eight-pager.

Funding is linked to all the variables that are discussed in this chapter, namely: ownership and control, training and skills, staffing and access to resources for community media. Access to funding often depends on who has ownership and control. Without funding, a community media organisation is unable to provide training and skills to its employees as well as to hire professional staff and provide them with adequate resources. It then becomes difficult to print and distribute the newspaper consistently and attract readers and advertising. This makes funding even more of a challenge to access.

#### **4.2.2 Ownership and control**

The *Alex News* newspaper is owned and controlled by Caxton, which owns many community newspapers countrywide. This information in terms of ownership and control of *Alex News* is supported by the data from the *Alex News* and Caxton website, which cites that *Alex News* is published by Caxton Local Media and printed by Caxton Printers, a division of CTP Limited (Alex News [sa]). Caxton & CTP Publishers, Printers and Distributors was founded in 1980 by two entrepreneurs: Terry Moolman and Noel Coburn (Caxton [sa]). The company publishes a number of regional community newspapers, the Citizen daily newspaper and 13 major magazines: as well as doing commercial printing, packaging, stationery manufacture and book printing. Caxton is one of the largest publishers and printers of books, magazines, newspapers and commercially printed material in South Africa. It employs over 5 500 people and owns 120 community newspaper publications (Caxton [sa]). *Alex News* is therefore owned by a South African media giant.

The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is owned and controlled by Kwa-Mgo Media (Pty) Ltd, which owns no other entities. According to Mgogodlo, *Greater Alex Today* newspaper was established in 2009 as a co-operative. In 2015 there was a conflict

among members of the co-operative, and they went their separate ways. Mgogodlo then re-registered the newspaper under Kwa-Mgo Media (Pty) Ltd with the aim of using it to develop the community. “The main aim of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is to empower, create employment opportunities and spread information within communities around the greater Alexandra vicinity,” he says. Some of the focus group participants claim to know the publisher of *Greater Alex Today* and call him a son of Alexandra. According to one female participant, “The owner of *Greater Alex Today* is the child of Alexandra; he is not getting enough support and is struggling financially to sustain his newspaper.” This clearly indicates that the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is owned and controlled by a member of the Alexandra community while *Alex News* is owned and controlled by an outside company.

Kwa-Mgo Media owns and controls only one community media newspaper while Caxton owns and controls most of the community newspapers in the country. The ownership and control of *Alex News* means that the newspaper is fully funded, as the newspaper is one of 120 community newspapers owned by Caxton. The owners of *Alex News* have been in the business of both community and commercial print media for the past 40 years, which means they are well established. *Alex News* is not experiencing any funding challenges because the owners are financially stable and have support from some of their media businesses, unlike *Greater Alex Today* which does not have any financial support. This clearly indicates that the issue of ownership and control has a significant impact on the developmental role of community media in society.

Furthermore, the interview with the founder of *Greater Alex Today* reveals the following: “I am the founder of *Alex News*,” says Mgogodlo. “I used to print with Caxton, but due to financial challenges my debt for printing accumulated, the account was in arrears and I was unable to pay the money owed to them. Caxton ended up taking over the control and ownership of my newspaper. The passion I have for community newspapers inspired and motivated me to establish the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper.” Mgogodlo says he has managed to grow his brand despite facing numerous challenges. The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper has been a finalist at the MDDA-Sanlam Awards for the best community newspaper and for the best



front page. This account highlights the consequences of lack of funding among independent community newspapers, in that their ownership and control end up being taken over by media giants such as Caxton.

#### **4.2.3 Training and skills**

Lack of training and skills is another challenge hindering community print media in executing its developmental role in society. According to the owner and acting editor of *Greater Alex Today*, John Mgogodlo, his newspaper is severely affected because they do not have any qualified media staff. The founder is unable to hire full-time journalists. He said he now prefers to work with volunteers and interns, as they do not expect any payment for the work done. The newspaper relies on three freelancers and one intern staff member, and volunteers. Some of his freelancers are not qualified but have a passion for the media. In terms of qualifications and experience in running a community media organisation, Mgogodlo is not willing to disclose what qualifications he holds; however, he emphasises the fact that he has 20 years' experience in running a community newspaper. In addition, he says, "Some of these freelancers, I have taught them how to write - they joined me without any qualification and experience." This highlights that the founder has passion and experience, but possibly not the required qualifications to run a community newspaper.

The youth focus group reveals the opinion of a female participant that, "*Greater Alex Today* stories sometimes have spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and the stories are not properly edited." This clearly indicates that *Greater Alex Today* lacks journalism training and skills. The literature reviewed also confirms the above view of a member of the Alexandra community. Weinberg (2011) is of the opinion that journalism skills of community media are weak and there is less training provided to its staff. This view is also supported by Bofo (ed) (2000:21), who claims that community media cannot afford to hire professionally qualified staff due to financial challenges. This also explains the link between funding and training and skills, which shows that, without funding, a community newspaper is unable to hire skilled people and to provide training to its staff members.

The views of various scholars in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two about weak media skills in community media do not apply to *Alex News*. According to the *Alex News* editor, Siphiso Siso, all his editorial team and all the departments involved in *Alex News* have the relevant qualifications and experience for the jobs they are doing. Siphiso Siso holds a journalism degree and has 15 years' experience in community media as a journalist and an editor. Nduduzo Nxumalo, a journalist for *Alex News*, has a degree in communication and is currently studying for an honours degree in media studies, while veteran journalist Leseho Manala also holds a degree in journalism. The *Alex News* newspaper is the opposite of *Greater Alex Today* in terms of training and skills.

Caxton has an in-house Cadet School to ensure professionalism in their journalism. They also have the Caxton skills development programme which provides extensive training and empowerment to its staff at all organisational levels, including senior management training, management development training, a graduate programme and apprenticeships. In addition, Caxton has internal training programmes which are developed to reduce the skills shortage in the industry including: sales and advertising training, creative writing, mentorships and graphic design courses (Caxton [sa]). This kind of training and skills development improves the quality and usefulness of a newspaper, building its brand and attracting readers.

According to a male learner from Alexandra Secondary School: "My English teacher wants us to read *Alex News* every week - she says it helps us to improve our written and spoken English. Every Thursday we have a section where we share stories about the weekly contents of the *Alex News* newspaper." According to another female participant, "This newspaper is helping us a lot. If we have service delivery issues, we inform the journalists and they publish the story; by so doing the municipality will respond immediately to fix the problem. I had a sewer blockage and I reported the problem numerous times to the City of Joburg customer care service. They gave me reference numbers and promised to send maintenance personnel to fix it and that never happened. I phoned *Alex News*, and they came and took photos, then published the article online and the following day the sewer was fixed. I also received a surprise visit from the ward councillor accompanied by the maintenance

people who told me that *Alex News* contacted them about the sewerage blockages.” *Alex News* is therefore contributing to improving language skills as well as assisting in ensuring that there is service delivery in Alexandra Township.

Almost all the focus group participants are familiar with *Alex News* journalists. The learner focus group discussion reveals that they often attend school functions such as prize-giving day, open day and functions that are community-related. According to a female learner from Kwabhekilanga Secondary School, “*Alex News* has a section of school news; every week they publish articles about the achievements and good stories that are happening in schools. These articles motivate other schools to work hard.” This indicates that *Alex News* is well equipped with the most needed newsroom skills. The newspaper therefore acts a mediator and a link between government and the residents of Alexandra.

Nevertheless, some participants read neither *Alex News* nor *Greater Alex Today*, preferring mainstream daily newspapers which are popular in the area. Two of the male participants’ responses to the question “Which community newspaper do you prefer between *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*?” are that they read neither *Alex News* nor *Greater Alex Today*. The first participant’s answer is: “None, I am used to reading Daily Sun; while the second participant’s response is: “None. I prefer Sowetan and The Star - they contain serious news.” The claim of other participants is that the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not properly marketed within the community; hence it is not popular. This indicates an element of choice among the readers in that they select which newspapers to read, often making their decisions on the basis of perceived professionalism.

Furthermore, according to independent researchers, 32 percent of decision-makers living in the Alexandra Township read the free *Alex News* newspaper. Although Alexandra standard living measures have decreased from 1-5 in 2010 to 1-3 in 2019, 21 percent of the residents read the more affordable Daily Sun and 8 percent read the more costly Sunday Times. It has been calculated that each copy of *Alex News* has about 2,5 readers (*Alex News* [sa]), which shows that *Alex News* is the most widely read newspaper in the community of Alexandra. *Greater Alex Today*’s readership is inconsistent at best due to its small and unreliable footprint. This

indicates that for a community newspaper to compete successfully in the marketplace its staff must be skilled and have access to the necessary training.

#### **4.2.4 Access to resources**

*Greater Alex Today's* office is situated in a residential area. The offices are currently located at the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue flats in Alexandra Township. The newspaper does not have a proper office but is operating in the one-room bachelor's flat where the founder is residing. The room is divided into three sections: there is a bed and a wardrobe on the right-hand side and in the middle next to the bed there are three desktop computers, one printer, one laptop, one desk with three chairs and in the corner is a kitchen with a cupboard, stove and sink. The passage opposite the bathroom is filled with piles of newspapers. The office setup and environment are not conducive for working.

The founder and acting editor of *Greater Alex Today*, John Mgogodlo, has been operating from home for over two years because the offices that the newspaper staff were using in Marlboro were shut down by the community. These offices, which were an innovation hub, belonged to the Department of Economic Development. After a new company occupied some of the office space, members of the community claimed that the company was not hiring local people and protested, with the result that the hub was shut down. *Greater Alex Today* had no choice but to re-locate somewhere affordable. The newspaper's lack of access to resources renders their management powerless when it comes to selecting offices.

The office setup also has implications for the working conditions of *Greater Alex Today* employees. The words of one freelance journalist who wants to remain anonymous are: "I don't feel comfortable working with him in his bedroom; hence I normally send the articles via email. I do not like going to his house more often unless there is a need." Furthermore, the *Greater Alex Today* staff have to operate without workstations and there are not enough computers and laptops. There are only three desktop computers, one laptop and one small printer. There is also a shortage of chairs and desks, forcing some employees to sit on the bed while

working. There is no privacy for sales representatives to see clients, and no landline telephone to call them, so the sales representatives have to use their own cellphones. Without access to the proper resources, working conditions in community media can be extremely difficult for employees.

These working conditions naturally affect the content of the newspaper. Because the journalists do not have vehicles to take them to stories, they rely on public transport and are sometimes late for stories or fail to cover some of them due to lack of money for fares. They prefer receiving press releases, as they are unable to attend events that are far from their office. No landline telephone is available for them and they must therefore rely on their cellphones. The newspaper is also outsourcing printing, at great expense, to Caxton and Media 24, as they do not own a printing company. According to the interview with Mgodlo, "Printing costs are expensive - it is outsourced as printing machines cost millions to buy and are owned by the media giants such as Caxton and Media24. The printing companies also own almost 80 percent of community newspapers in the country and they make sure that the independent community media newspapers are not visible." Community media need adequate access to resources to cover relevant stories first-hand.

*Alex News* offices are situated at number 368 Jan Smuts Avenue in Craighall Park. The whole building caters for different publication titles and has a professional working environment setup. A receptionist in the reception area assists all the visitors and answers the landline. The office is spacious with three boardrooms and a big kitchen. *Alex News* is well resourced and has professional offices; each staff member has both a laptop and a desktop computer, a landline phone, access to 4G internet, office space to work in and all the necessary resources. The journalists have vehicles and travel allowances as well as cellphone allowances to enable them to do their work. They are always on time and they attend most of the community events. This claim is supported by a male focus group participant from Minerva Secondary School, with the words: "I am the captain of the school football team. I usually phone the Editor of *Alex News*, Siphiso, to cover our tournaments and they always attend, and publish our sports stories. *Alex News* has never let us down." This newspaper's access to resources enables its journalists to cover local stories reliably.

The interview reveals that *Alex News* is fully furnished with all the necessary resources and staff. Siso joined *Alex News* in 2005 as a journalist and in 2008 was promoted to editor; he runs the editorial department with two journalists under him (excluding the intern journalist). There are also full-time designers and layout artists, advertising personnel, sub-editors, proof-readers and a distribution team. “We are very consistent, and we adhere to our deadlines. In the case of load shedding, we have stand-by generators as a backup to ensure that the production of the newspaper is not interfered with,” says Siso. Therefore, access to resources is what enables community newspapers to print regularly and on time.

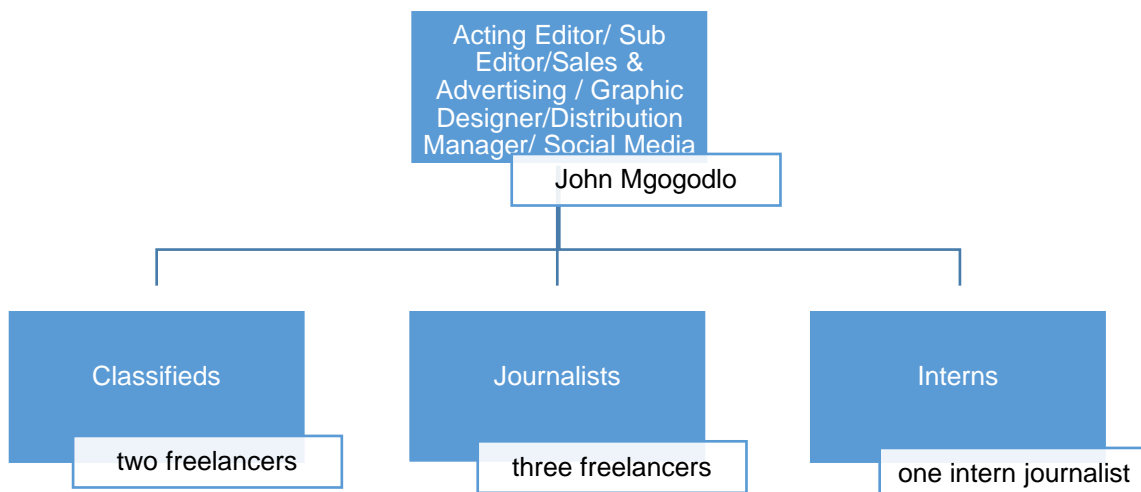
Siso says his newspaper is a tool used by different stakeholders to disseminate information, entertain and empower Alexandra residents. According to him there is no conflict of interest in terms of his newspaper’s stories; because, as the editor, he decides on the selection of articles to be published. “The advantage I have is that the branch manager was a former journalist and understands how the newsroom works. She left that legacy. The problem arises when the branch manager does not have experience in how the newsroom works,” he explains. They even have an open-door policy for the residents of Alexandra to contact the newspaper, to submit letters and give suggestions on how to improve the newspaper. The editor believes that *Alex News* is fulfilling its developmental mandate in Alexandra, as their paper contains fresh and relevant news.

Printing costs are generally a challenge for community newspapers, as they do not sell enough advertisements to cover them. This does not apply to *Alex News*, however, as they have their own printing company, and the newspaper is supported by other Caxton community newspapers. According to Siso, “The printing cost is the biggest hindrance to the development of community newspapers. The fewer the copies of newspapers printed, the more expensive they are to print; while the more the copies that are printed, the cheaper it is to print.” This indicates that access to resources is a result of availability of funding.

#### 4.2.5 Staffing

Staffing of community newspapers is also highlighted as a challenge that is hindering community newspapers from fulfilling their developmental mandate in society.

*Greater Alex Today* newspaper is unable to hire full-time journalists. The newspaper relies on four freelancers and one intern staff member, and volunteers. According to the founder of *Greater Alex Today*, John Mgogodlo, he is an all-rounder who does everything for the newspaper. This is supported by data from *Greater Alex Today* website and the copy of the newspaper attached in Appendix B. (*Greater Alex Today* [sa]).



**Table 4a: *Greater Alex Today* Organogram**

The researcher obtained organograms of *Greater Alex Today* and *Alex News*. Organograms indicate the staff structure of an organisation, lines of authority and responsibilities of each individual in an organisation. They also specify the channels of communication among different staff members in an organisation. *Greater Alex Today* has only one permanent staff who is an all-rounder and responsible for the day-to-day running of the newspaper. John Mgogodlo is the founder of *Greater Alex Today* and has the following roles: acting editor, sub-editor, sales and advertising

representative, graphic designer, distribution manager and social media manager. The rest of the staff team are freelancers: they include two classifieds representatives, three freelance journalists and one intern journalist. This organogram is supported by the data from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, with Reader & Hatcher (2012: 13) being of the opinion that community media have a small contingent of staff members and are in most cases operated by one or two people, with the owner playing different roles.

A content analysis of *Greater Alex Today* copies indicates that there is little division of labour and few media personnel. The founder is the acting editor and the advertising salesperson, and there are also two freelance sales representatives. There are freelance journalists and one intern journalist. The acting editor is also a layout artist (*Greater Alex Today* p2 15 August 2018). An interview with a freelance journalist for *Greater Alex Today* who requested to remain anonymous yielded some insights into the challenges experienced. The journalist is passionate about journalism and joined *Greater Alex Today* to gain experience in the media industry. "I am studying a Diploma in Journalism with Damelin College doing my second year. I have gained knowledge in gathering and writing news articles during my tenure as an intern journalist," says the freelancer. It is, however, difficult to work for *Greater Alex Today* as staff are paid their salaries late and do not have transport fare to cover stories or money for airtime. This clearly indicates that staffing, skills and training, and access to resources is determined by funding.

According to *Alex News* editor, Siphiso Siso, *Alex News* is adequately staffed with full-time employees. These include designers and layout artists, an advertising department, sub-editors, proof-readers, a distribution team and editorial department with two journalists and an editor. The learners' focus group discussion reveals that the participants know the *Alex News* journalists because they often attend their schools' functions. *Alex News* has a team of 46 permanent staff members and one journalist graduate, which includes editorial, production, digital, sales, debtors, classified and administration teams (*Alex News* [sa]). With adequate staffing, a community newspaper's journalists become known in the community.



The content analysis of *Alex News* copies also highlights divisions of labour and that the newspaper has adequate media personnel for each role; for example, there is a group editor, editor, digital coordinator, sales manager, classified manager, distribution manager, sports editor, reporters, sales representatives, auto dealer manager, chief sub editor, sub editor, senior layout artist and layout artists (*Alex News* p4 3 August 2018). *Alex News* journalist Nduduzo Nxumalo said they are paid market-related salaries and are happy working for *Alex News*. They have cellphone and travel allowances which make it easy to do their job. *Alex News* has a proper and professional office setup, and the environment is conducive for working. There is also a good relationship between the journalists, editors, layout artists and advertising departments for the different community newspapers. Professional working conditions at *Alex News* clearly boost staff morale.

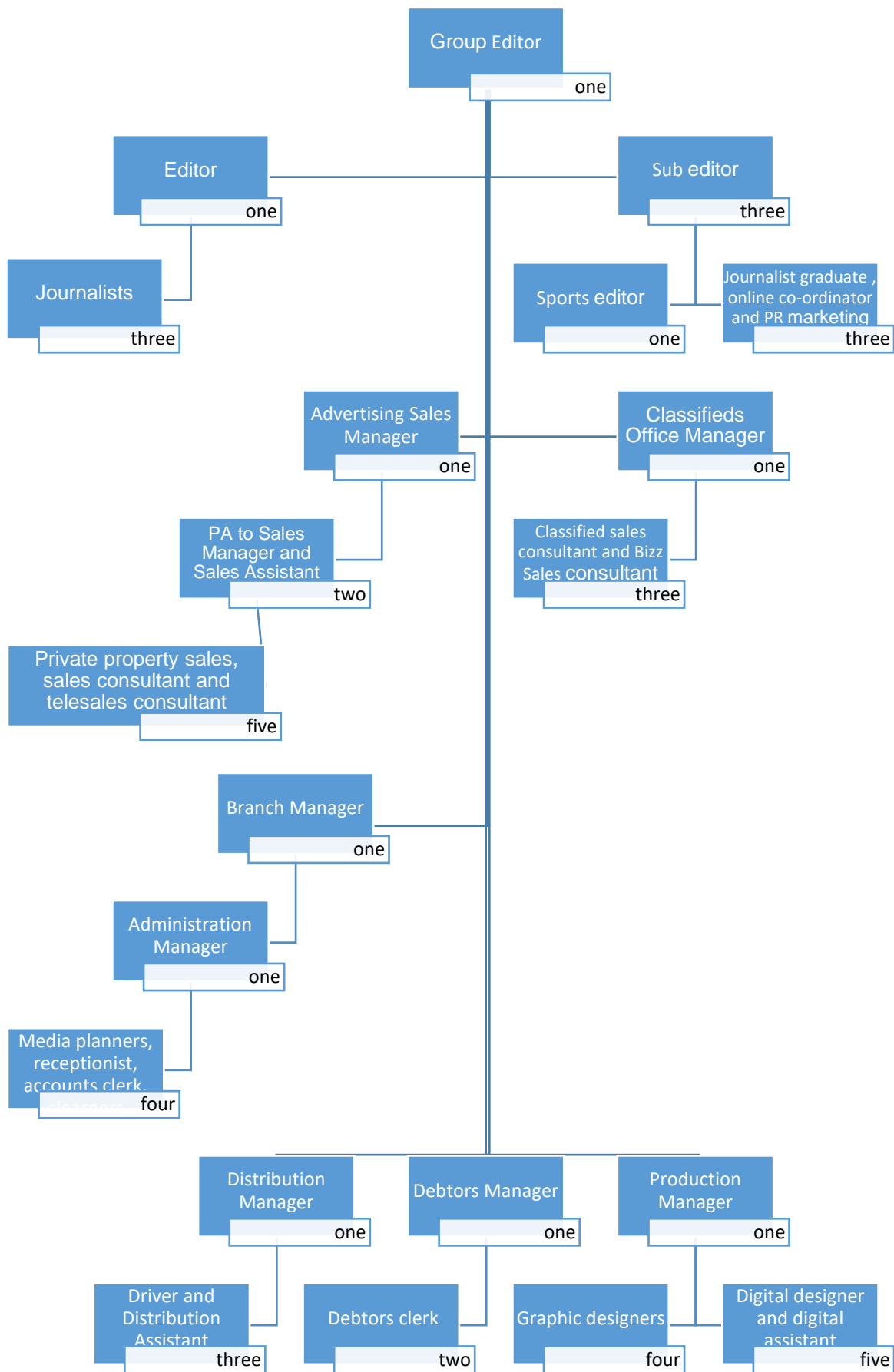
The fact that *Alex News* is well equipped impacts positively on the content of the newspaper also. This claim is supported by the August 2018 editions of *Alex News* which shows that the newspaper has plenty of content, which includes the following: crime, community news, service delivery, housing issues, municipality news, human interest stories, school news (local and surrounding areas), sports (local and national news), land issues, community social events, entertainment, local business news (SMMEs), court news and columns. A comparison of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* shows that *Greater Alex Today* has less content, the articles are long and there is too much text. The newspaper layout of *Greater Alex Today* is not appealing compared to *Alex News*, which has bright and colourful pictures.

Funding impacts on staffing, training and access to resources. The fact that *Greater Alex Today* is unable to hire professional employees and provide them with adequate resources due to lack of funding affects the operations of the newspaper as well as the content. The *Greater Alex Today* and the *Alex News* community newspapers have websites that they use to publish their stories online. The websites of these two community newspapers were accessed on 14 August 2019. The *Greater Alex Today* website was last updated on 1 August 2019, which means it is only updated every fortnight (*Greater Alex Today* [sa]). The *Alex News* website was last updated 57 minutes before being accessed in terms of local stories and 2 hours before being accessed in terms of top stories (*Alex News* [sa]). The *Alex News*

website is user-friendly, and the articles published on the website can be shared to different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and email. While the *Greater Alex Today* website articles can also be shared to different social media platforms, the website is too busy and overcrowded (Greater Alex Today [sa]). This clearly indicates that there are regular updates on *Alex News* website because there are enough staff members who are adequately resourced; on the other hand, this also highlights a lack of professional social media staff to work on the *Greater Alex Today* website.

Both *Greater Alex Today* and the *Alex News* have Twitter handles: the *Alex News* Twitter handle is @AlexNewsZA and the handle for the *Greater Alex Today* is @GreaterAlex2day. The Twitter pages of these two community newspapers were accessed on 14 August 2019. *Greater Alex Today* joined Twitter in June 2014 and they last Tweeted on 30 October 2015. *Greater Alex Today* has 398 followers, 1021 following, two likes and 234 Tweets (Greater Alex Today [sa]). *Alex News* joined Twitter in December 2012 and had last Tweeted 12 minutes before the page was accessed. *Alex News* has 3 324 followers, 124 following, 170 likes and 15, 2 million Tweets (Alex News [sa]). The staffing differences between the two newspapers are reflected in their performance on Twitter.

These two newspapers have Facebook pages that were accessed on 14 August 2019. *Alex News* Facebook page was created on 20 February 2014. They have 14 528 followers and 13 742 likes, and the page was last updated 13 minutes before it was accessed (Alex News [sa]). *Greater Alex Today* Facebook page was created on 13 June 2014 and has 711 followers and 707 likes. The page had last been updated on 31 July 2019 (Greater Alex Today [sa]). This means that *Greater Alex Today* is not active on Twitter as they last used this tool three years 10 months before the time of access. *Alex News* is active on Twitter and Facebook, and has more followers and Tweets compared to *Greater Alex Today*. This shows that *Alex News* is more popular than *Greater Alex Today* among Alexandra residents.



#### **Table 4b Alex News Organogram**

*Alex News* has 46 permanent staff members and one journalist graduate. The newspaper has the following departments: editorial, sales, digital, administration, production, finance and distribution. Each department has a manager and a team of staff members. No staff members are required to be all-rounders, so they are able to focus on their jobs. The newspaper, as a result, is professionally run.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

The findings are presented according to five variables which are linked, namely: funding, ownership and control, training and skills, staffing and access to resources. The findings highlighted that these are the five main factors that are hindering community newspaper from executing their developmental mandate in society. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two confirms the findings; however, there are new developments that indicate that printing costs are a major challenge that hinders the growth of community newspapers. The findings presented demonstrate that financial constraints are a major factor that is leading to other challenges such as lack of training and skills, under-staffing and lack of access to resources.

The following qualitative research methods are used to collect data: interviews, focus groups and content analysis. The field interviews were conducted at the offices of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* with the editors and journalists. The interview with John Mgogodlo, who is the founder, publisher, acting editor and sales advertising person, was held at his home at number 27 Block A, phase 3, 10th Avenue in Alexandra Township on 19 February 2020. The interview with the freelance journalists for *Greater Alex Today* was done on 22 February 2020 at the Mall of Alex in Alexandra. The interview with *Alex News* editor, Siphiso Siso and Nduduzo Nxumalo, the journalist was held at Caxton newspaper offices in Craighall Park on 26 February 2020.

The focus group discussions were divided into three groups: the first focus group was with the learners from secondary schools in Alexandra who are residing in the area from the age of 18 to 19. Participants in the second focus group were the youth,

both males and females, from the age of 22 to 35, residing in Alexandra. The third focus group was for adults, both males and females, from the age of 36 to 60. Each focus group had eight participants, bringing the total to 24 participants. The focus group discussions were held at Alex San Kopano Community Hall on Corner 12<sup>th</sup> Ave and Selborne Street, Alexandra on Saturday, 7 March 2020. A maximum of two hours was allocated for each focus group discussion.

Of the secondary school learners in the first focus group, four were males and four were females. They were all Grade 12 learners aged 18 years from the following schools in Alexandra: Menerva Secondary School, Realogile Secondary School, Kwabhekilanga Secondary School, Alexandra Secondary School and East Bank High School. The first focus group ran from 08:00 am to 9:45 am, and the second focus group discussion was held at 10:00 am with the youth aged between 22 and 35, four males and four females.

The discussion was based on whether community newspapers are fulfilling their developmental mandate in society, comparing *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. The aim was to understand the participants' opinions and ideas on the role played by these two community newspapers in their township. The majority of the youth are familiar with both *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today*; however, they claimed that there is no consistency in terms of the weekly distribution of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper. The participants were also familiar with *Alex News* editorial staff.

The third focus group discussion was held at 12:45 pm, with four males and four females from the age of 36 to 60. Many participants in this focus group cited that they were not aware of the existence of *Greater Alex Today* community newspaper. This clearly indicates that the newspaper is not popular among the residents of Alexandra Township. Some participants did not know that the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper exists, while others claimed that there is no consistency in terms of the distribution of the newspaper.

## 5 CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The pivotal lens that the critical political economy of the media has lent to the analysis of media institutions is the inclination to the examination of power in their operations and practices. This power, which can be political and economic, and whose tentacles may extend to cultural production and reproduction in newsrooms, the critical political economy argues, can shape what the media produces. The critical political economy of the media is characterised by its attention in investigating the social totality of social relations that make up the economic, political, social and cultural areas of engagements. Wasko (2005:25) takes this formulation further by stating that Vincent Mosco defines political economy of communication as, “The study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources.” This formulation has a practical value on what this study set out to enquire about. The key research question was, “How is the meaning and role of community print media shaped by the constraints of structure and agency?” The issue of explaining community media as defined by development communication literature is further reinforced by the strength of this definition, which reveals how economics and power can drive and re-define the role of community media in society.

The key question asked in this chapter is whether community print media is fulfilling its developmental mandate in society. It is answered using a comparative study of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* community newspapers. This chapter also uses the critical political economy of the media and the corpus of literature to interpret the findings in the preceding chapter. These findings will be discussed under five thematic categories derivative of the findings. The chapter is structured in the following way: the opening section explores funding, followed by ownership and control, training and skills, staffing and, lastly, access to resources.

### 5.1.1 Funding

*Greater Alex Today* newspaper does not have any source of funding and depends solely on advertising revenue to pay for its printing costs, salaries and for the day-to-day running of the newspaper. The *Greater Alex Today* founder, John Mgogodlo, stated that it is difficult to get funding from the MDDA and the private sector. The literature reviewed also highlighted that the MDDA is underfunded by the government; hence it is unable to fund all the community media projects across the country. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two also emphasised a lack of funding as a major challenge for community media. This relates to the current situation faced by *Greater Alex Today*, because without funding they are battling to print the newspaper, pay employees' salaries and to afford to travel to gather news stories. Funding plays a crucial role in ensuring that community newspapers can execute their developmental role as well as being able to function sustainably. The issue of *Greater Alex Today* can be explained through critical political economy, which assumes that power and economy has implications for the operations of media institutions. In most cases black-owned community newspapers are struggling to sustain themselves because of the inequalities of the past, especially the racial stratification in South Africa. This newspaper does not have power and is struggling financially compared to *Alex News*.

The issue of funding for community media can best be explained through the theory of critical political economy, which is concerned about how mankind arranges the allocation of scarce resources with a view toward satisfying certain needs and not others. A total of 60% of the MDDA's funding is allocated to community projects that are owned and controlled by the community, with any revenue generated being reinvested in the media project. The MDDA defines community projects as those that have community interest, strong public participation and are not for profit. The projects that are registered as Section 21, NPO, CBO or cooperatives can also apply in the small commercial media funding category, but they can only receive either grants or loans. The grants are funded directly by the MDDA while the loans are provided by a strategic partner that meets the conditions of the MDDA Act (MDDA [sa]). Since South Africa has many community media projects across the country,

only a few projects can benefit from MDDA funding. Some community projects, such as the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper, have not yet been considered for funding. This highlights the principles of critical political theory in that only certain projects benefit from this scarce funding resource while others are left out in the cold. This also raises the question of whether the community projects that are benefiting from the MDDA funding have the power of influence over those who are decision-makers.

*Greater Alex Today* falls under the category of non-profit community media projects but has not yet been considered for funding despite the fact that the MDDA advertises twice a year, calling for applications relating to project funding. This is explained through the theory of critical political economy, because the MDDA board, supported by its management, selects projects that meet the requirements for funding. This means that the MDDA, which does not have enough resources, has a way of allocating those resources to benefit some while denying others.

Furthermore, community newspapers are non-profit organisations that generate their revenue through selling of advertising space. The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper, however, is not obtaining sufficient advertisements to run the newspaper. The newspaper printed only two editions instead of five in the month of August 2018 due to insufficient advertisements and therefore a lack of money to print the newspaper. The newspaper is printing only 10 000 copies a week because it cannot afford its goal of 30 000 copies. This indicates how structure, which is the pattern according to which community newspapers should generate their own revenue to sustain themselves, is affecting the sustainability of community newspapers. This has a negative impact on the developmental mandate of community media, which is to educate, inform and entertain its community.

The focus group discussions also highlight that the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper lacks consistency. Participants feel the newspaper is no longer serving their needs because their stories are not being published. This clearly indicates that *Greater Alex Today* is unable to execute its developmental mandate weekly as per their



distribution times because they are unable to pay for the printing costs. *Greater Alex Today* is outsourcing printing from Caxton and Media 24. These two printing companies own and control numerous community newspapers across the country. They print their own newspapers while the *Greater Alex Today* is outsourcing printing from them. This is an example of agency, as it shows inequalities within the structure of community media. There are those that have the resources and run the community media and those that cannot afford to own printing machines, like the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper.

In addition, *Greater Alex Today* has serious financial problems because they are not funded. The newspaper is struggling to pay its employees and sometimes they are paid late. Mgogodlo, the founder, was summoned to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) for failing to pay his employees. He had to borrow money from a family member in order to pay the money owed to his staff members. The fact that this newspaper is battling to pay its employees means that their staffing is adversely affected by their lack of funding, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

On the other hand, *Alex News* is the opposite of *Greater Alex Today* in that it does not have any funding challenges. *Alex News* is owned by Caxton, which has its own printing company. It is printed consistently, never having missed a week. The employees of *Alex News* are paid market-related salaries. *Alex News* often gets first preference in terms of advertisements compared to the *Greater Alex Today*, which means *Alex News* is highly rated. The newspaper is also supported by its sister community newspapers when advertisements are placed by large companies in many of the Caxton publications, as this media house has a large footprint. This also explains how agency shapes community media in that *Alex News* is independent and does not rely on another company for printing.

The fact that *Alex News* is operating smoothly without any funding constraints is explained through political economy, which is about survival - the control of a society in order to produce what is necessary to survive - and maintaining order to meet societal goals. The participants of the focus group discussion praised this newspaper for its consistency in delivering relevant news and acting as a link between the

community and the government. *Alex News* is consistent and has succeeded in its attempt to fulfil its developmental mandate in Alexandra while doing what it can to sustain the newspaper. Despite its financial challenges, however, *Greater Alex Today* won an award as a finalist at the MDDA-Sanlam Awards for the best community newspaper and the best front page. This shows that *Greater Alex Today* has the potential to compete with *Alex News*, given all the necessary funding.

### **5.1.2 Ownership and control**

The MDDA Act no. 14 of 2002 states that community media is defined as any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where finance generated from the project is reinvested in the project (MDDA [sa]). This MDDA definition of community media is also supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. According to Carpentier & Doudaki (2014:416) Tabing (2002:9) defines community media as “operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community.” This definition of community media is in contrast with *Alex News* which is a community newspaper but not owned and controlled by the community that it is serving.

*Alex News* is owned and controlled by Caxton Local Media and printed by Caxton Printers, a division of CTP Limited (*Alex News* [sa]). Caxton publishes a number of regional community newspapers, the Citizen daily newspaper and 13 major magazines, as well as doing commercial printing, packaging, stationery manufacture and book printing. Caxton is one of the largest publishers and printers of books, magazines, newspapers and commercially printed materials in South Africa (Caxton [sa]). This clearly indicates that *Alex News* is failing to fulfil some of the characteristics of community media which indicates that it should involve community participation. The fact that *Alex News* is not owned by the community but by a big company shows how structure is being undermined in community media. The structure of community ownership and control of community newspapers does not exist in *Alex News*.

In addition, Wasko (2005:26) states that Mosco asserts that political economy is about survival and control with respect to society. It is about producing what is necessary to survive and maintaining order to meet societal goals. This explains the case of ownership and control of *Alex News*. Caxton, in fact, controls the community through their newspaper. The main aim of this large company is to sustain the newspaper, and they do this while meeting the needs of the community that they are serving.

Meanwhile, the founder of *Greater Alex Today*, John Mgogodlo, is also the founder of *Alex News*. "I am the founder of *Alex News*. I used to print with Caxton, but due to financial challenges my debt for printing accumulated, the account was in arrears and I was unable to pay them. Caxton ended up taking over the control and ownership of my newspaper. The passion I have for community newspapers inspired and motivated me to establish *Greater Alex Today* newspaper," he says. This is an example of how a big and financially stable media house can take over the ownership and control of a community-owned local newspaper. Hardy (2014: 28-30), argues that critical political economy of media focuses on how the politics and economics of the media industry affects the production, distribution and interpretations of the information disseminated. This theory explains how the economic situation of *Alex News*, under the ownership and control of John Mgogodlo, who was part of the community, affected the production of the newspaper. The fact that Mgogodlo was unable to pay debt owed to Caxton led to their taking over the control and ownership of *Alex News*.

The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper was established by Kwa- Mgo Media (Pty) Ltd. Kwa-Mgo Media owns and controls only one community newspaper while Caxton owns the majority of the community newspapers in the country. However, *Greater Alex Today* is no longer owned by a cooperative. According to Mgogodlo, in 2015, he re-registered the newspaper under Kwa- Mgo Media (Pty) Ltd after having a conflict with the members of the co-operative which previously owned the paper. This shows that community members are unable to run a successful community media project alone, as they are unable to resolve conflict. The ownership and control of

*Greater Alex Today* is still in the hands of the community, however, as there are board members who are part of the community.

The different ownership and control of these two newspapers indicates that not all community media are owned and controlled by the communities they serve. The structure of community ownership and control of community media is changing, as agency is promoting different ownership and control of community media. The ownership and control of community newspapers has a significant impact on the developmental role played by community media. *Alex News*, which is owned by Caxton, does not experience any funding, staffing, resources, and skills challenges as a result their journalists are capacitated to execute their developmental mandate as a community newspaper. On the other hand, the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is struggling financially and unable to meet its developmental obligations to the community of Alexandra.

### **5.1.3 Training and skills**

The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is severely affected by a lack of qualified media staff as well as a lack of training in media and marketing. The newspaper hires only unqualified freelance journalists and uses mostly interns and volunteers because it does not have money to pay salaries for qualified personnel. Most of the people working for *Greater Alex Today* are incompetent and incapacitated. According to a female participant of the youth focus group discussion, “*Greater Alex Today* stories sometimes have spelling mistakes and the stories are not properly edited.” This indicates a severe lack of training and skills. *Greater Alex Today* is unable to play a developmental role in Alexandra as they are incapable of empowering others with media skills because they also in dire need of training.

In the interview, Mgogodlo failed to disclose whether he is qualified to operate a newspaper. He only emphasised the fact that he has 20 years’ experience in running a community newspaper. One could also argue that, because he failed to sustain *Alex News* and is currently battling with the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper, Mgogodlo might not really be qualified to run a community media project despite

having 20 years' experience. In most instances, the developmental role that community media plays is to train grassroots journalists and empower them with the necessary skills to break through to the mainstream media, particularly the commercial media. Community media is seen as a head start for journalists to sharpen their skills. This means that *Greater Alex Today* is failing in its developmental mandate to impart skills and to train its community in media skills.

Furthermore, structure is impacting negatively on *Greater Alex Today* in that community newspapers are non-profit organisations that are distributed free of charge to communities. This newspaper is difficult to distribute due to lack of funding, which is the economic factor that affects the production and distribution of the media, as explained through the theory of critical political economy. This also affects interpretation of the information that has been disseminated, as the participants of the focus group discussions highlighted many negative things about *Greater Alex Today*. They said that the newspaper lacks consistency, the articles have grammatical errors and spelling mistakes, and the journalists do not cover their stories.

*Alex News*, on the other hand, has all the necessary skills and they have hired qualified and experienced staff members. The Caxton Newspapers Cadet School teaches young graduates' journalism and writing skills in order to ensure professionalism. There is also the Caxton skills development programme which provides extensive training and empowerment to its staff at all organisational levels. In addition, Caxton has internal training programmes which are developed to reduce the skills shortage in the industry, including sales and advertising training, creative writing, mentorships and graphic design courses (Caxton [sa]). This shows that *Alex News* has invested in skills and training development and is therefore able to produce a quality newspaper. The training and skilling of employees of *Alex News* is also explained through the theory of critical political economy. *Alex News* uses its economy, which is the funds from Caxton, to ensure that its employees are trained and skilled. This results in the newspaper fully executing its developmental mandate in society through consistently producing and distributing the newspaper weekly. One can also argue that the economic status of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper affects the production and the distribution of the newspaper.

#### 5.1.4 Access to resources

Access to resources for community media is determined by access to funding. Hardy (2014: 27-29) maintains that the critical political economy theory assumes that different ways of organising and financing communications have implications for the nature of the media content. This means that without finance community media will not have access to resources. *Greater Alex Today* does not have a proper office, as they are operating in a one-room bachelor's flat in Alexandra where the founder of the newspaper, John Mgogodlo, is residing. *Greater Alex Today* does not have any funding; hence they do not have access to adequate resources.

*Greater Alex Today* operates in a residential area with little in the way of equipment. There are only two desktop computers, one laptop and one small printer, which is not enough for journalists to work on. There are no landline telephones for the journalists and sales representatives to make phone calls and they rely on their cellphones. They are also using a 3G dongle for internet connection and sometimes they run out of data. There are no chairs and tables to work on, and some staff members have to sit on the bed while working. There is no privacy for clients and sales representatives. The offices of *Greater Alex Today* do not provide a conducive environment for a workplace.

*Greater Alex Today* journalists also do not have vehicles to take them to stories; because they must use public transport, they are either late for stories or fail to attend them because there is no money for transport fare. The journalists prefer receiving media releases, as they are unable to attend events that are far from their office. In addition, most of the focus group participants thought that the newspaper no longer exists because it is not frequently distributed. They also claim that they send invitations to the editor of *Greater Alex Today* inviting the paper to cover community and school events and he does not attend; or, if he or his journalists do attend the events, no stories are published about them. *Alex News* is more popular than *Greater Alex Today* in Alexandra Township. This is because *Alex News* is distributed weekly while *Greater Alex Today* is unable to do this as they do not have enough money for printing. The fact that *Greater Alex Today* is unable to send

journalists to different community functions indicates how this newspaper is failing in its developmental role to disseminate information amongst the community. The fact that the newspaper is unable to cover some of the community stories shows how structure and agency shapes the content of this newspaper.

The issue of lack of access to resources for *Greater Alex Today* is best explained through the theory of critical political economy which presumes that the economic status of the media organisation affects the content of the publication, as they are unable to gather community news. This indicates how structure and agency is shaping the content of *Greater Alex Today*, because the newspaper now only covers press releases, because there is no transport budget to enable journalists to gather stories. This clearly indicates that *Greater Alex Today* is unable to fulfil its developmental mandate due to the lack of the resources most needed to operate a community newspaper. Furthermore, the economic status of the newspaper is also exposed by the fact that they are outsourcing printing from their competitor Caxton; hence *Alex News* is dominating.

The *Alex News* is well resourced and has a professional office environment setup, with each staff member having a laptop, landline phone and access to 4G internet dongle. The offices have unlimited WiFi for internet connection and they also have standby generators in case of load shedding. The office is spacious and there are air conditioners, a boardroom and a kitchen. The journalists own vehicles and they are given a travel and cellphone allowance to enable them to do their work. *Alex News* offices are situated at number 368 Jan Smuts Avenue in Craighall Park. Most of the focus group participants acknowledged that they receive *Alex News* weekly. The newspaper is distributed at their nearest spaza shops, school gates, shopping centres, police station and fuel stations. The participants also know *Alex News* journalists because they are visible to the community during local and school functions. This indicates that *Alex News* has an element of nearness to the community and that they cover community stories.

The participants of the focus group discussions said they read *Alex News* because it informs them about what is happening around their community and about municipal

issues. This means that this newspaper acts as a link between the community and local government. It is also used to hold the local government to account in terms of service delivery issues. This clearly means that *Alex News* is fulfilling some of its developmental roles of ensuring that it informs the community on what is happening around them, holding government to account and becoming a link between government and the community.

However, the fact that *Alex News* offices are located in Craighall Park, which is a suburb far from Alexandra, and is not owned and operated by the community, means that the newspaper lacks community participation. The focus group discussion participants raised concerns about the volume of the *Alex News* newspaper, stating that the newspaper is thin, having only eight pages. They said the newspaper is filled with inserts and there is less content than advertising. They highlighted that some of their stories which should have been published the same week are either moved to the next edition or published online because of a shortage of space. According to Siphiso Siso, the editor for *Alex News*, their content ratio is 60 percent editorial and 40 percent advertisements; however, he highlights that there are not enough advertisements to support the newspaper fully. He said some of the stories that are not published on the newspaper are published online on the newspaper's website. This shows that *Alex News* is failing to balance the ratio between editorial and advertisements; however, the justifications raised by the *Alex News* editor must be considered, as they also publish the stories online. This means that they should educate their readers about online news.

### **5.1.5 Staffing**

Staffing is crucial for the community media to execute its developmental mandate in society. It is, however, determined by access to funding and resources. The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper has only one full-time staff member, four freelancers, one intern and volunteers. Greater Alex Today's founder, John Mgodlo, does everything, as he is the acting editor, salesperson, writer and editor of stories and the designer of the layout of the newspaper. This shows that this newspaper is understaffed, because they do not have money to pay for the employees' salaries. *Alex News* is adequately staffed with full-time employees, which include designers



and layout artists, an advertising department, sub-editors, proof-readers, a distribution team, and an editorial department with two journalists and an editor. *Alex News* is not financially constrained, as it can afford to pay the salaries of 41 full-time staff members and a salary for one journalism graduate who is not full-time. The fact that *Greater Alex Today* is unable to hire and pay salaries for professional staff members has an impact on the quality of the newspaper that they are producing. The critical political economy theory also supports the above view that the economy of the newspapers has an impact on their content.

In terms of staffing and organograms, the *Alex News* organogram totally excludes the community of Alexandra. *Alex News* has a team of 46 permanent staff members and one journalist graduate, and none of these staff members reside in Alexandra or belong to the community. This contrasts with the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper, the founder of which is the only permanent staffer, John Mgogodlo, who is born and bred in Alexandra Township. The *Greater Alex Today* team includes freelancers and an intern who are also Alexandra residents. *Alex News*, however, does not empower Alexandra residents in terms of employment opportunities, as it has employed professional staff members who do not reside in Alexandra. This means that *Alex News* is not produced by the community while *Greater Alex Today* is produced by the community, as all of its team members are from Alexandra.

Staff members use their professional skills to produce the newspaper. The articles for *Alex News* are precisely detailed and relevant, with local content; and the pictures are colourful. The newspaper is appealing and easy to read. *Greater Alex Today* has articles that are too long with fewer pictures, and the newspaper is boring to read. *Alex News* has more advertisements compared to *Greater Alex Today*. This shows that *Greater Alex Today* does not have enough staff members and skills, or a qualified team to work on the newspaper.

Both *Greater Alex Today* and *Alex News* community newspapers have websites that they use to publish their stories online. However, *Greater Alex Today* does not update its website regularly, as it was last updated 14 days before being accessed by the researcher. *Alex News* website was last updated 57 minutes before being

accessed by the researcher, which clearly indicates that their website is updated regularly. The same applies to their Twitter and Facebook pages, as *Alex News* is active on Twitter and their Facebook page has more followers than *Greater Alex Today*. This is because the *Alex News* has dedicated staff members to work on social media content while *Greater Alex Today* has a shortage of staff members.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The critical political economy was used to interpret the findings in this chapter. The findings were divided according to five variables, namely: funding, ownership and control, staffing, access to resources, and training and skills. The critical political economy assumes that the economic and political status of the media has an impact on the content of the newspaper. It also assumes that scarce resources are not equally distributed, as some benefit while others do not. This explains the differing operations of *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* newspapers.

The findings also highlight that both *Alex News* and *Greater Alex Today* are failing to fulfil their developmental mandate in Alexandra. *Alex News* excludes community participation, as none of the community members are involved in the production and operations of the newspaper. *Alex News* is operating in Alexandra, but its offices are located outside their operating area and the newspaper has not yet employed Alexandra residents. In contrast, *Greater Alex Today* involves community participation as most of their team are residents of Alexandra and their offices are located in Alexandra.

*Greater Alex Today* does not have any source of income and depends solely on advertisements to sustain the newspaper, while *Alex News* is financially stable as it is owned by a media giant. *Alex News* is well staffed and has all the necessary resources to operate a community newspaper, while *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is under-staffed, under-resourced and the team is under-skilled. This clearly indicates a big difference between the two newspapers. Financial constraints have a huge impact on the development of community media. Although Mgogodlo is the founder of *Alex News*, the newspaper was seized from him because he was unable to pay off its printing debt to Caxton. This is typical of agency, as community media are unable to operate independently due to lack of resources and funding.

## 6 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusion

The conclusion will answer the question: “How is the meaning and role of community print media shaped by the constraints of structure and agency? The findings of the research, based on the data collected and the analysis, conclude that the constraints of structure and agency are shaping the role of community media. The structure of community media entails that a community media house is a non-profit organisation which generates its own revenue and reinvests the money generated, that it involves community participation and that its ownership and control is in the hands of the community it serves. The structure, which is the pattern of how community newspapers should generate their own revenue to sustain themselves, is affecting the developmental mandate of community newspapers.

The *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is struggling to generate its own revenue, there are not enough advertisements to sustain the newspaper and there is no funding for the newspaper. There are also inequalities in community media as a result of agency; Caxton, which owns *Alex News*, also owns a printing company that is printing their newspaper. *Greater Alex Today* is outsourcing printing from Caxton, which represents unfair competition among community media. The printing costs are hindering *Greater Alex Today* from executing its developmental mandate in society as they are unable to pay the full bill, resulting in the newspaper not being distributed weekly. Caxton, however, which owns a printing company, is printing its newspaper weekly. This, then, explains how the constraints of structure and agency shape the meaning and role of community print media.

The structure of ownership and control of community media has a huge impact on the developmental mandate of community media. *Alex News*, which is owned by Caxton, is not facing any challenges while *Greater Alex Today*, which is owned by the community and adhering to the structure of community media, is facing several challenges including lack of funding, lack of training and skills, under-staffing, lack of professionalism and lack of resources. This highlights how structure severely affects

the development mandate of community media, as all these challenges make it impossible for *Greater Alex Today* to execute its developmental mandate. The different ownership and control of these two newspapers indicate that not all community media are owned and controlled by the communities they serve. The structure of community ownership and control of community media is changing, as agency is promoting different ownership and control of community media.

*Greater Alex Today* is failing in its developmental mandate to impart skills and to train its community in media skills because they also are in dire need of training. The newspaper is also failing to distribute weekly and to send out journalists to gather news stories, and they rely on media releases. The fact that the newspaper is unable to cover community stories shows how structure and agency shapes the content of this newspaper. *Greater Alex Today* does not have all the necessary resources and staff compared to *Alex News*, which is well resourced and does not have any constraints hindering it from covering all the community stories.

The claims by civil society, academics and the community have been proved to be true. These claims are that the control and ownership of community media is not in the hands of the community that it serves but in the hands of outsiders who are after business opportunities and profit-making, and that community media lacks community participation and is failing in its developmental mandate. *Alex News* is not owned and controlled by the community; it excludes community participation as none of the community members are involved in the production and operations of the newspaper. *Alex News* is operating in Alexandria, but its offices are allocated outside their operating area and the newspaper has not yet employed Alexandria residents. In contrast, *Greater Alex Today*, which involves community participation with most of its team being Alexandria residents and with offices in Alexandria, is failing to execute its developmental mandate due to lack of funding. Funding plays a crucial role in ensuring that a community newspaper can execute its developmental role while functioning and sustaining itself.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Printing costs are a major challenge affecting the developmental mandate of community media. As a result, the community newspapers that do not own printing machines are failing to sustain their publications. The researcher recommends that government should assist community newspapers by providing a subsidised printing machine that can be placed in a central place for easy access by the community newspapers. This printer will solve the problem of community newspapers failing to print due to lack of funds. The money previously used for printing costs could then be used to hire professional media staff and for the operations of the community newspapers.

The researcher recommends that community newspapers could also transform themselves from traditional, printed newspapers to digital media, to cut the printing costs. The market for traditional newspapers is declining with the growth of information communication technology (ICT). Readers can now access and read newspaper stories online through their cellphones at their own convenience. Therefore, government should also expand broadband networks across all communities to ensure that residents have access to internet connections. This can be done by installing broadband networks in public places and institutions such as community centres and libraries, which will enable citizens to read their community newspapers online.

The government should review the role played by its entity, the MDDA, in supporting the community print media in South Africa. More funds should be allocated to the MDDA. This will help highlight the challenges of funding, lack of professional training, access to resources and staffing. There should be a way to measure the success of community media to ensure that government funding is used to benefit community projects in the best possible ways. Media practitioners and publishers should conduct research before starting community projects to determine their potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This will help identify the challenges that can hinder the sustainability and developmental mandate of community media. Government should also prioritise the training of community media staff with journalism skills, to improve the editorial content of newspapers. The

fact that *Greater Alex Today* newspaper has spelling mistakes indicates a lack of journalism and editing skills. The newspaper cannot afford to hire professional staff, which affects the content of the newspaper.

This study is important, as it presents the challenges that are hindering community print media from fulfilling its developmental mandate in society. In addition, it has exposed the difference between community newspapers that are owned by big media houses, such as *Alex News* under Caxton, and community newspapers owned by individuals or co-operatives from the community, such as *Greater Alex Today*. Few studies have been conducted to compare community newspapers with different ownership and control. This research can be extended by investigating the reasons behind the success of community newspapers owned by media companies such as Media24, Caxton and Capital Media. Such research is recommended, because it will assist in identifying the solutions that can lead to the development of successful community newspapers owned by individual community members or co-operatives.

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## Appendix A

### 1 Transcripts of interviews

#### 1.1 Interview with John Mgogodlo, founder, and acting editor of *Greater Alex Today*

The interview with John Mgogodlo, who is the founder, publisher, acting editor and sales advertising person of *Greater Alex Today*, was held at his home at number 27 Block A, phase 3, 10th Avenue in Alexandra Township on 19 February 2020.

**Question:** A brief discussion about yourself and the background of your newspaper

**Answer:** We established *Greater Alex Today* newspaper in 2009 as a co-operative. In 2015 there was a conflict among members of the co-operative, and they went their separate ways. I then re-registered the newspaper under Kwa-Mgo Media (Pty) Ltd with the aim of using it to develop the community.

**Question:** What qualifications do you hold and how many years' experience in the media industry?

**Answer:** I have 20 years' experience in running a community newspaper. Some of the freelancers that I have hired they did not know how to write, I have taught them how to write - they joined me without any qualification and experience.

**Question:** What made you choose to pursue journalism career?

**Answer:** I have great passion for community media and in running my own community project.

**Question:** How long have you been working as the Editor?

**Answer:** I am the founder of *Alex News*, I used to print with Caxton, but due to financial challenges my debt for printing accumulated, the account was in arrears and I was unable to pay the money owed to them. Caxton ended up taking over the control and ownership of my newspaper. The passion I have for community newspapers inspired and motivated me to establish the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper.

**Question:** What developmental role does your newspaper play in the area that you are servicing?

**Answer:** The main aim of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is to empower, create employment opportunities and spread information within communities around the greater Alexandra vicinity.

**Question:** What are the challenges that you face on a daily basis while trying to do your work?

**Answer:** Printing costs are expensive; it is outsourced as printing machines cost millions to buy and are owned by the media giants such as Caxton and Media24. The printing companies also own almost 80 percent of community newspapers in the country and they make sure that the independent community media newspapers are not visible.

It is difficult to acquire funding, I have applied for funding several times from the MDDA and the private sector, and we have not yet been considered. I am failing to print my newspaper weekly as it is supposed to be due to lack of funding. I solely depend on advertisement to pay for printing costs, salaries and to sustain the newspaper. In the month of August, *Greater Alex Today* only printed two editions instead of five due to lack of money for printing. For the past two months I have been printing every fortnight due to financial constraints. I am struggling to source adverts to sustain the printing costs. *Alex News* often get first preference in terms of advertisements. I am struggling to source adverts. I rely on government and small adverts but it's not enough to run the newspaper

*Greater Alex Today* received funding was when it was registered under a co-operative before the members went their separate ways. It was then that the community newspaper qualified for once-off funding from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) under the Co-operative Incentive Scheme (CIS) for primary co-operatives. The money was not enough to sustain the newspaper. We managed to print for a few months and to buy small equipment such as laptops and a small printer and pay employees' salaries.

Operating a community newspaper without funding is stressful. I am failing to print my newspaper weekly as it is supposed to be due to a lack of funding. I depend solely on advertisements to pay for the printing costs, salaries and to sustain the newspaper. It is difficult also to get advertisers to place adverts in the newspaper because of the small footprint that our newspaper is covering. There are times where we do not print because we do not have adverts to place in the paper.

Some of the journalists and marketing staff took me to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) demanding the salaries that I had failed to pay them for more than three months. I lost the case and the judgement declared that I must pay all his employees for the months they had worked. I had to borrow money from my family and relatives to pay the money owed to the employees for salaries.

I have been operating from home for over two years because the offices that we were using in Marlboro were shut down by the community. These offices, which were an innovation hub, belonged to the Department of Economic Development. After a new company occupied some of the office space, members of the community claimed that the company was not hiring local people and protested, with the result that the hub was shut down. We had no choice but to re-locate back to my house which is used as an office.

## **1.2 The interview with the freelance journalists for *Greater Alex Today*.**

The interview was done on 22 February 2020 at the Mall of Alex in Alexandria, the freelance journalist requested to remain anonymous.

**Question:** A brief discussion about yourself

**Answer:** I am studying a Diploma in Journalism with Damelin College doing my second year. I have gained knowledge in gathering and writing news articles during my tenure as an intern journalist at *Greater Alex Today*.

**Question:** What are the challenges that you face on a daily basis while trying to do your work?

**Answer:** We always get paid two to three months late. Mgogodlo tells us that there is no money. The weekly newspaper is sometimes printed per fortnight or once a month. We are also distributing 10 000 copies per edition instead of 30 000 and some people within the community do not receive the newspaper.

I do not feel comfortable working with him in his bedroom; hence I normally send the articles via email. I do not like going to his house more often unless there is a need

### **1.3 Interview with Sipho Siso, the Editor for *Alex News***

The interview with *Alex News* editor, Sipho Siso and Nduduzo Nxumalo, the journalist was held at Caxton newspaper offices in Craighall Park on 26 February 2020.

**Question:** A brief discussion about yourself

**Answer:** I joined *Alex News* in 2005 as a journalist and in 2008 was promoted to editor. I am in charge of the editorial department with two journalists under me (excluding the intern journalist).

**Question:** What qualifications do you hold and how many years' experience as a journalist?

**Answer:** I hold a journalism degree and have 15 years' experience in community media as a journalist and an editor



**Question:** What developmental role does your newspaper play in the area that you are servicing?

**Answer:** *Alex News* is a tool used by different stakeholders to disseminate information, entertain, and empower Alexandra residents.

There is no conflict of interest in terms of the newspaper's stories; because, as the editor, I decides on the selection of articles to be published. The advantage I have is that the branch manager was a former journalist and understands how the newsroom works. She left that legacy. The problem arises when the branch manager does not have experience in how the newsroom works.

We have an open-door policy for the residents of Alexandra to contact the newspaper, to submit letters and give suggestions on how to improve the newspaper.

*Alex News* is not experiencing any financial challenges and is able to print consistently is that the newspaper is owned by media giant Caxton, which owns many community newspapers, magazines, and a national daily newspaper

*Alex News* prints 40 000 copies of newspaper which are distributed weekly on a Thursday, with 20 000 copies going to the old part of Alexandra Township while the other 20 000 go to the new development houses and malls. The content ratio is 60% editorial and 40% advertising, but he points out that there are not enough advertisements to print all the stories. Our newspaper is eight pages because we do not have enough adverts to support the publication. Some of the stories that are not published in the newspaper are published online on the newspaper's website instead. I have built the *Alex News* brand and has a good relationship with the community of Alexandra. We are no longer running up and down for stories - the community of Alexandra contacts us for news stories.

**Questions:** How does political landscape, funding and resources influence the developmental mandate of community newspapers?

**Answer:** The printing cost is the biggest hindrance to the development of community newspapers. The fewer the copies of newspapers printed, the more expensive they are to print; while the more the copies that are printed, the cheaper it is to print. *Alex News* is not affected by printing cost as Caxton owns a printing company and the newspaper is supported by other Caxton community newspapers

Our newspaper is 8 pages because we do not have enough adverts to supplement the publication. Some of the stories that are not published on the newspaper are published online on the newspaper's website. We are no longer running up and down for stories, the community of Alex contact us for news stories. adverts to sustain the publication printing costs.

The printing cost is the biggest hindrance to the development of community newspaper. The lesser copies of newspapers printed the more expensive to print while the more copies printed it is cheaper to print.

*Alex News* is fully resourced with full-time designers and layout artists, advertising personnel, sub-editors, proof-readers, and a distribution team. We are very consistent, and we adhere to our deadlines. In the case of load shedding, we have stand-by generators as a backup to ensure that the production of the newspaper is not interfered with.

**Question:** To what extent does internal and external issues impact on the developmental mandate of community newspapers?

**Answer:** *Alex News* is fulfilling its developmental mandate in Alexandra, as the newspaper contains fresh and relevant news.

#### **1.4 Interview with Nduduzo Nxumalo, *Alex News* Journalist**

**Question:** What qualifications do you hold and how many years' experience as a journalist?

**Answer:** I hold a degree in communication and currently studying for an honours degree in media studies,

We are paid market-related salaries, and I am happy working for *Alex News*. They provide us with cellphone and travel allowances which make it easy to do their job.

## **2 Focus group discussions**

The focus group discussions were held at Alex San Kopano Community Hall on Corner 12<sup>th</sup> Ave and Selborne Street, Alexandra on Saturday, 7 March 2020. A maximum of two hours was allocated for each focus group discussion.

**2.1 The first focus group was with the Grade 12 learners aged 18 years from the following schools in Alexandra: Menerva Secondary School, Realogile Secondary School, Kwabhekilanga Secondary School, Alexandra Secondary School and East Bank High School.**

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you have access to?

**Answer:** Most participants have access to *Alex News*

**Question:** How often do you receive your community newspaper?

**Answer:** Most participants receive *Alex News* every week at their school gate.

Most of the participants doubted whether *Greater Alex Today* newspaper still exists.

“I don’t think this newspaper still exists; I last saw the newspaper at Alex Mall about three months ago,” said, a male learner from East Bank High School

“There is no consistency in the distribution of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper,” said, a female learner from Realogile Secondary School

Most participants thought that *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is no longer existing.

There was a debate, others saying it has been distributed after some time not weekly while others saying they last saw the newspaper three months ago.

A male learner from East Bank High School said, “I don’t think this newspaper is still existing, I last saw the newspaper at Alex Mall about three months ago.”

Another female learner from Realogile Secondary School said, “There is no consistency the distribution of the *Greater Alex Today* newspaper. We invite the editorial team of this newspaper to our school to cover our events and sometimes they do come but our stories are not published.”

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you prefer or like and why?

**Answer:** Most participant prefers *Alex News* because it is accessible and cover relevant local content.

“*Alex News* has a section of school news; every week they publish articles about the achievements and good stories that are happening in schools. These articles motivate other schools to work hard,” said, a female learner from Kwabhekilanga Secondary School.

**Question:** What are the benefits of having these community newspapers?

**Answer:** “My English teacher wants us to read *Alex News* every week - she says it helps us to improve our written and spoken English. Every Thursday we have a section where we share stories about the weekly contents of the *Alex News* newspaper,” said, a male learner from Alexandra Secondary School.

**Question:** Do you know the owners or the editorial team of these newspapers?

**Answer:** Some of the participants knows the editorial team of *Alex News*.

“I am the captain of the school football team. I usually phone the Editor of *Alex News*, Siphiso Siso, to cover our tournaments and they always attend, and publish our sports stories. *Alex News* has never let us down,” by a male focus group participant from Minerva Secondary School,

**Question:** Do these community newspapers cover local and relevant news?

**Answer:** Most of the participants states that *Alex News* often attend school functions such as prize-giving day, open day and functions that are community-related

The complaint of a female learner from Realogile Secondary is: “We invite the editor of *Greater Alex Today* newspaper to our school to cover our events and sometimes they do come but our stories are not published.”

“I read *Alex News* every week; however, the paper is thin - there are not enough stories. Some of the stories are not published on the newspaper but on the website,” are the words of a male learner from East Bank High School.

## **2.2 The second focus group discussion was with the youth from Alexandra aged between 22 and 35, four males and four females.**

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you have access to?

**Answer:** According to a male participant, “I read *Alex News* because it is delivered in our yard letterbox every Thursday. This newspaper informs us about what is happening around Alex and what is intended to be done by the municipality. The government is using this newspaper to communicate with us; hence it is very essential for us residents to read it.”

**Question:** How often do you receive your community newspaper?

**Answer:** Most of the participants receive *Alex News* every Thursday.

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you prefer or like and why?

**Answer:** Most participants prefer *Alex News* because it is accessible.

“*Greater Alex Today* stories sometimes have spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and the stories are not properly edited,” said, one male youth participant.

A male youth said, “We only have one community newspaper in this township which is *Alex News* as it is distributed weekly. *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not consistency and not accessible.”

Another female youth said, “*Greater Alex Today* is struggling, its content and quality cannot be compared to *Alex News*. The stories are not edited properly, sometimes they are spelling mistakes.”

**Question:** What are the benefits of having these community newspapers?

**Answer:** Another female participant's argument is: "*Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not distributed regularly and if the owner is struggling, he must shut down the newspaper, as it is not benefiting the residents of Alexandra."

### **2.3 The third focus group discussion was with four males and four females from the age of 36 to 60.**

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you have access to?

**Answer:** Most participant have access to *Alex News* on a weekly basis.

**Question:** How often do you receive your community newspaper?

**Answer:** Most of the participants receives *Alex News* weekly and they were not aware of the existence of *Greater Alex Today* community newspaper.

**Question:** Which community newspapers do you prefer or like and why?

**Answer:** The first participant's answer is: "None, I am used to reading Daily Sun; while the second participant's response is: "None. I prefer Sowetan and The Star - they contain serious news."

While some participants preferred *Alex News* and claimed that *Greater Alex Today* newspaper is not properly marketed within the community

**Question:** What are the benefits of having these community newspapers?

**Answer:** "*Alex News* is helping us a lot. If we have service delivery issues, we inform the journalists, and they publish the story; by so doing the municipality will respond immediately to fix the problem. I had a sewer blockage and I reported the problem numerous times to the City of Joburg customer care service. They gave me reference numbers and promised to send maintenance personnel to fix it and that never happened. I phoned *Alex News*, and they came and took photos, then published the article online and the following day the sewer was fixed. I also received a surprise visit from the ward councillor accompanied by the maintenance people who told me that *Alex News* contacted them about the sewerage blockages," said female participant.

**Question:** Do you know the owners or the editorial team of these newspapers?

**Answer:** “The owner of *Greater Alex Today* is the child of Alexandra; he is not getting enough support and is struggling financially to sustain his newspaper,” said, a female participant.

Another female participant said, “This newspaper is not distributed regularly and if the owner is struggling, he must shut down the newspaper as it is not benefiting the residents of Alexandra.”

A male participant said, “I read *Alex News* because it is delivered in our yard letter box every Thursday. This newspaper informs us about what is happening around Alex and what is intended to be done by the municipality. The government are using this newspaper to communicate with us hence it is very essential to the residents.”

## **Appendix 2**

*Alex News* newspaper copies



# ALEX NEWS



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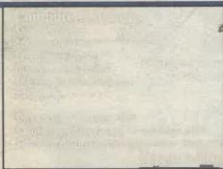
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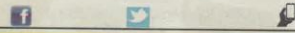
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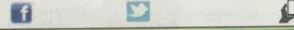
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New College To Help Youth **4**

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Sports Guru **8**

# GREATER ALEX TODAY

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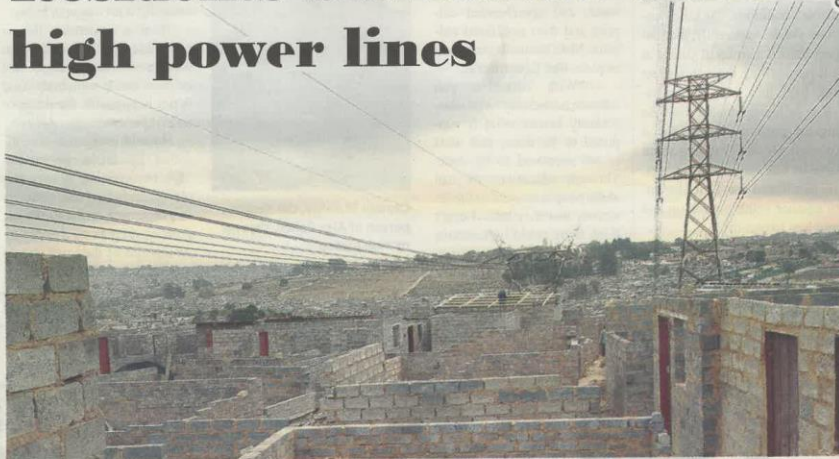
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