

# COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

## WEEK NINE: Media Power in Relation to Political Power and Sovereignty

### Learning Outcomes



1. Understand the concept of Democracy
2. Explain Democracy in Africa
3. Critic The Mass Media and Democratic Consolidation in Africa
4. Discuss New Media and Democracy in Africa.

### INTRODUCTION

In this lecture, attempts have been made to understand media power in relation to political establishments and the place of democracy in Africa. There is no doubt that democracy, as we know it today, could not have survived in the western world without the constant vigilance of the media. And in highlighting the plight of the oppressed peoples of Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, and several other African countries, the media have been instrumental in forcing the United States government, in particular, to change her African policy, making it more consistent with her ideals of individual freedom and equality of opportunity. Yet, in spite of the positive changes that the western media have brought about, we cannot expect the African media to play exactly the same role in sustaining democracy as defined by Europe or America. We need to bear in mind that when it comes to the role of the media in African political systems, it is necessary to be conscious of the fact that the ability to effect meaningful change depends, ultimately, on how acceptable to the people the functions the media seek to perform in society are. The euphoria of the South African struggle for liberation encouraged the African masses in the 1990s to believe the time has come to be liberated from dictatorial autocrats who while promoting obscure notions of national development and stability deterred all forms of opposition.

According to Imoh (2013), one of the elements of democracy and the rule of law is the freedom of expression. To democratize is to ensure free unhindered two-way communication between the government and the governed. The essence is to ensure the responsiveness of the government to the yearnings of the people and for the people to put their views across to government without fear or hindrance and in an atmosphere devoid of interference. The most crucial factor for the sustenance of democracy in Africa would consist of the enthronement of a popular- sovereignty that touches the daily lives of the populace, gives meaning to the notion of citizenship and goes beyond the constitutionally defined form of rule. The role of the media is facilitative, supportive and integrative. To achieve greater media effectiveness in promoting democratic ideals and governance in Africa, there is need for private sector partnership and involvement of civil society organizations in media ownership in order to achieve a balance

## The Concept of Democracy

According to Imoh (2013), democracy is popularly conceptualized as government of the people, by the people and for the people. As a concept, democracy has problems of homogeneity in that it is often used in an ambiguous and inconsistent way, such that it means different things to different people; in different contexts (Ojo, 2003:15). The concept can better be examined from two points of view; that is, as ideology and as politics (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:1). Democracy as an ideology is the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, the rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. On the other hand, democracy as politics is concerned with the institutions and processes of governance that may elicit, tend to foster consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:1). However, democracy as conceived in the West may present an ideology of democracy that has problems for developing countries in Africa and other developing countries (Ikoku, 1992:117). As Nwabueze (1993) observed, “western democracy places people into artificial antagonistic boxes, turn friends into enemies and aims at arousing unnecessary competition”. He maintains that democratization is not only a concept, nor is it synonymous with multipartyism but a concept concerned with conditions of things, conditions such as a virile society, a democratic society, a free society, a just society, equal treatment for all citizens by the state, an ordered, stable society, a society infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy, justice and equality. Democratization requires that a society, the economy, politics, the constitution of the state, the electoral system and the practice of government be democratized. Against this background, Kabira et al (1993) have argued that no society qualifies as democratic, representative and progressive until there is free and voluntary participation of all its citizens in all spheres of life. According to them, no society participating fully and meaningfully in politics are removed.

### *1.1 Democratic Institutions and Processes*

According to Imoh (2013), certain institutions are fundamental for democratic processes and the sustenance of the process. These were identified by Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992:19) to include; pressure groups, political parties, the civil bureaucracy and the court system. Even though these institutions are vital for proper democratic practices, it is noteworthy that most of them were created by government, enjoy government subventions and government has virtually eaten their way into the operations and activities of these institutions. For democracy to survive, these are some fundamental processes such as: a visionary and effective executive, a committed and responsible legislative, a fearless and firm judiciary, a forthright and courageous press, an active and tolerant multiparty system, and a free and fair electoral system sustained by an independent and incorruptible electoral commission (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:5 1).

### *1.2 Essential Basic Rights in a Democracy*

According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje, there are certain basic rights that are essential for popular and participatory democracy. These include economic, political, social and human rights.

- a. **Economic rights;** The right to work, the right to choose one’s trade and profession and the right to participate in controlling and managing economic activities of the nation.

- b. **Political rights:** These include the right to participate in the decision making process in the country, the right to have full residence opportunities, the right to form associations and the right to equality before the law.
- c. **Social Rights:** These entails the right to free education at all levels, the right to health insurance and care, the right to safety and welfare of all citizens, and the right to equal treatment before the law.
- d. **Human rights:** These includes the right to life, to human dignity, to fair hearing, to private and family life, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of expression and of the press, the right to peaceful assembly and association, the right to freedom from discrimination.

### **Democracy in Africa**

Democracy as a concept is not new to Africa (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:11). In some African communities, the traditional system of government was relatively democratic. As Obasanjo and Mabogunje rightly observed, the political structure and processes of most pre-colonial communities within the enclave of what is present day Nigeria were relatively democratic. In Botswana, the, Kothia system of native administration is reasonably democratic and participatory. In Igbo traditional society in south eastern Nigeria, there was an element of democracy in the way the people governed themselves. Onwumechili (2000) reported that the Igbos governed themselves without giving power to chiefs or kinship. Drawing a parallel between scientific western culture of democracy and the legacies of “Igbo EnweEze” which recognized “no kings or chiefs with divine knowledge”. He rationalizes the “Igbo EnweEze” legacy by noting that science has no kings, just like the Igbos. In traditional Igbo communities, the people organized themselves into many independent village governments which meet periodically as the need arose to discuss and take decisions on both internal and external affairs of the village.

The council might be limited to certain age grades but the assemblies were for all and sundry. Every man could and did have his say on all matters under discussion. Nobody had any special privileges because of ancestry (Onwumechili 2000). Today, the varieties of democratic governance found on the continent reflect the diverse cultural and historical antecedents and varieties of traditional governance system among the constituent nationalities (Isoba 2008:20). These varieties may not strictly conform to the realities and nature of modern democratic governance and universal standard which prescribes participation and inclusion by rotation through elections among political groups that compete to occupy positions of power in the governance process. Most of the 53 democracies on the African countries are at the infantile stage compared to western liberal democratic standard. As Isola (2008:20) observed, most of these African countries are yet to grapple with the realities and nature of modern liberal democratic governance. They are still grappling to fathom a balance between traditional political culture and the modern system of governance, hence the emergence of “Sit tight” dictators and protracted single party rules in some African countries, such as Kenya, Zaire, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Zambia. Others such as Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc. have witnessed military rule before embarking on the path to democracy. The northern African countries have tempted to combine western style democracy with classical Islamic governance culture which does not permit complete participation of individual citizens as expounded by western democracy (Isola, 2008:24). Rather, an element of theocracy which justifies divine ascendancy of leaders into governance is much more deep rooted. In Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Sudan, four north African countries, the same leadership has been in power

for almost three decades; even though elections take place occasionally to assert and legitimize the continuity of the extant leadership. There is a glimmer of hope for democracy in Africa in Southern Africa where Botswana stands out as an example of economic development, functioning governance and multiparty liberal democracy (Stedman 1993:1). The reverse is the case in Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau and Somalia where anarchy and violence continue to reign terror on the citizens.

### ***Mass Media and Democracy***

The role of the media in a democracy therefore is to assist in building an environment conducive to democracy, by promoting free choice of leadership, respect for the rule of laws, by both the rulers and the ruled, social justice and equity as well as respect for human rights (Obasanjo and Mobogunje 1992:133). Another important role of the mass media in a democracy is to assist in the entrenchment of a political culture that allows for free and orderly succession, especially of civilian to civilian administration.

### ***Objectives of the Mass Media in a Democracy***

The objectives of the mass media in a democracy as suggested by Oseni (1992:133) include the following:

- i. To convey information to the people with a view to letting them know how their mandate is being discharged.
- ii. To provide a forum through which the governed could react to government policies and activities.
- iii. To provide such analysis as would enable the people secure an adequate understanding of events and background to events.
- iv. To assist in the articulation and pursuit of the national interest.
- v. To help strengthen the economic, social and political fabric of the nation.
- vi. To provide informal criticism and viable alternatives.
- vii. To monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing deviation from agreed objectives.
- viii. To provide the medium for transmitting knowledge and education to the populace.
- ix. To function as an agent of modernization.
- x. To assist in setting an agenda for priorities in national development.

Idahosa (2008:207) however warns that the role of the media in a democracy could be dysfunctional if the operators of the media are not altruistic, nationalistic, selfless, broadminded, detribalized, proactive, incorruptible and trained to be able to objectively and constructively present news and other issues to the public.

### **The Mass Media and Democratic Consolidation in Africa**

Democratic consolidation is the capacity of the polity to nurture and sustain democratic values over a long spell with little or no threat of abortion of the democratic experiment in all ramifications (Sarton 1992 cited in Ojo, 2003 :5). In this respect, the mass media has played a significant role in the struggle for democracy in several African countries including Nigeria. In countries that have gone through autocratic and dictatorial rule (military regimes) the mass media have helped entrench democracy and cooperation between the new leaders and the citizenry through ideological persuasions that helped to legitimize the government and win the loyalty of the people (Ojo, 2003). But the efficacy

of the mass media in Africa in promoting democracy has been limited from the onset by several factors.

*Firstly*, Africa had a long colonial history without the benefit of a solid mass communication foundation that is capable of serving as the bedrock for the formation of truly independent, democratic and viable nation states. (Imoh, 1991:81).

*Secondly*, there was no favourable national political philosophy and ideology that is anchored on egalitarianism and democratic ideals (Ojo, 2003).

*Thirdly*, there was no reliable communication infrastructure needed for effective communication between the government and the vast majority of the people scattered over large geographical areas (Sabowale, 1989).

In most African countries, there are no systematic national communication policies aimed at achieving collective national goals as expressed in the Coat of Arms. As a result, mass media messages reflected the disputations, selfish competition and conflicts among rival political elite on the one hand and between them and the mass media practitioners on the other. Under these circumstances, the mass media often find themselves in the crossroad between globalization and the preservation of national interest and dominant culture (Isola 2008:24).

Human rights studies by the Amman Centre (ACHRS) in 2006 shows that the mass media in African countries, especially northern African Islamic countries are characterized by a large dose of state intervention. The studies show that the level of freedom for media practitioners operating in Arab countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria is low. In these countries, media personnel face physical harassments, threats and assault by state agents. In Somalia, a failed state where a protracted armed conflict and political crisis have rendered the state comatose, it has the worst record for providing the worst scenario for professional activities of the.. media. More journalists were killed in Somalia than in other Arab countries except for Iraq. (ACHRS Report 2001 cited in Isola (2008:26). The report revealed that Mauritania provides the best and most conducive operating environment for the African Arab media because the media are allowed enough freedom to encourage them to contribute to democratic governance. In some weak and failed states, such as Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, the mass media reflected the environment within which they operate. The risk of operating as a journalist or media owner is high in such states, and this discourages media professionals and investors in the media, except when one aligns with the dominant political groups who may facilitate media operation in exchange for media support and patronage to sustain the ruling groups ideologies, interests or hold on to power (Isola 2008:24). An example is the 1994 Rwanda genocide where radio and some print media were used in coordinating the effort to prosecute mass murder of the Tutsi ethnic group by the Hutu dominated government forces and civilians. In Zimbabwe, another failed state, where the media refused to collaborate with the state or dominant groups to perpetuate atrocities during crisis, the media has become a victim of official repression by the state. The constant harassment of journalists and media establishments has resulted in the inability of the media to perform their role as watchdog of society (Isola, 2008:24).

### **Challenges Facing the Mass Media in Promoting Democratic Consolidation in Africa**

After independence in the 1960s, there was no favourable political philosophy and ideology among the new leaders to promote egalitarian and democratic ideals among the

populace (Sadeeq 2003:248). Consequently, the marriage between politics and the media was broken by ethnic loyalties. For instance, Dr. Zik established the West African Pilot to fight for the rights of Eastern Nigeria, While Obafemi Awolowo established the Tribune at Ibadan to project the interest of the Yorubas (Obasanjo, 1992). - The unstable political and economic climate that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s coupled with idiosyncratic media policies and laws by autocratic leaders have led to a divisive disloyal, psychopathic praise singing, conscienceless and downright corrupt mass media in Africa. As a result, the politicians are able to use the media to remain in power rather than use it for mobilizing the people for national development (Ojo, 2003). Sadeeq (2003 :248) and Edeani (1989:109) have identified factors in the African environment which constraint the effectiveness of the mass media in democratic consolidation. These include the low level of infrastructural development and essential facilities, pattern of media ownership and control, unstable socio-economic and political conditions, low level of literacy and political education, ethnicity, parochialism, unfavourable legal environment and lack of private sector involvement. Other factors include religious pluralism and military interventions as the case was in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, etc (Isola 2008).

#### *Pattern of Media Ownership and Control in Africa*

The prevalence of government owned media is acting as a constraint to effective performance of the media as watchdog (Isola 2008:23). The mass media in most African countries are mostly government owned. The owners perform some gatekeeping functions that are conditioned by political, parochial and economic interests. As a result, the media serve the interests of elites or the government in power at the expense of the majority. Consequently, the impact of the socialization and democratization function of the mass media are limited. This has served as a self-limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to positively champion the cause of democratic consolidation in Africa (Imoh, 1991:182). The low level of private sector partnership and participation in the media business has led to an imbalance as most media-houses - especially radio-and—television are government-owned. The implication is that journalist must toe the line of government or be sacked by their employers. This way, the mass media is unable to monitor the activities of government (Ojo, 2003:5).

#### *Poor Socioeconomic Situation*

Poverty and democracy have an inverse relationship. In Africa, poverty is an all-consuming and multidimensional concept with multifarious causes and multidimensional effects that negatively affect the process of participatory democracy and decision making (Obasanjo, 1992:10). There are three broad types of poverty which may affect the sustenance of democracy. These are: Poverty of material wellbeing conceived as the lack of the basic necessity for the sustenance of life. Poverty of ideas among the leaders and the led resulting in lack of good judgment in supporting democratic processes in the society and Poverty of courage, typified by a situation where there is a timid citizenry very apprehensive and cautious in standing up against lapses on the part of those in power or telling the government what it has done wrong. In Africa, material poverty and the perpetual struggle for survival is overbearing and sets apathy into the practices of democracy. According to Obasanjo, when there is abject poverty, the masses are usually easily brainwashed and their rights of choice terribly manipulated. As a result, material poverty may lead to the poverty of ideas, and poverty of courage vitiates poverty of ideas

especially among those the fringe of material poverty such as the members of the judiciary, the protector of human rights (Obasanjo, 1992:110). The harsh economic situation in Africa has made journalists to be vulnerable and dependent on government patronage and support. Evidently, government political parties and those in the higher socio-economic strata are the largest advertisers and this makes newspapers and electronic organizations to fall over each other. And this hinders the freedom of the mass media to criticize the government as criticism of government will send a newspaper, radio, or television station out of business (Ojo, 2003). The extent of economic improvement of the contingent could minimize the dependence of the media on government patronage and this would go a long way in expanding the ability of the media to curtail the excesses of the government and the ruling class (Isola, 2008:22).

### *Poor Infrastructure and Facilities*

Most countries in Africa, South of the Sahara still carry the burden of irregular power supply to their urban and village communities and this has seriously impeded the usefulness of the electronic media, especially television. Consequently, most of the citizens are not aware of what is happening in their communities, including the government policies and programmes that are being implemented. Poor transport conditions and seasonal accessibility to some remote, arid or riverine areas make access to rural areas difficult for newspaper circulation, especially community newspapers which are fastly becoming elitist and merchantilistic (Sobowale 1989). Low level of technological development, and shortage of well trained mass communicators, have affected the quality of programming, production and transmission. The result is that most programmes lacked serious informational, educational and developmental content and their message signals did not travel far and wide enough for clear reception by the diverse audience. Many disenchanted literate urban and semi-rural dwellers have acquired dysfunctional communication gadgets such as video tapes, cable television, (DSTV, TV Africa) television games and other cheap popular entertainment gadgets that could divert the people from paying attention to more serious local messages that affect their lives and their communities (Sobowale, 1988).

### *Ethnic and Parochial Loyalties*

Democracy relies on divergence of interests and opinions to survive in pluralistic societies. In Africa, however, the pattern of horizontal and vertical segmentation among the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies has given rise to familism, parochialism and chauvinism in the body polity (Imoh 2008). This segmentation has served as a self limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to effectively champion the cause of democracy. In Nigeria, for instance, the Tribune represents the Yoruba interest, the *New Nigerian*, the northern interests while the *West African Pilot* was used by Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe to promote the sociopolitical interests of Eastern Nigeria (The Ibos). (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). The conflicting interests between ethnicity, politics and religion on the one hand and politics on the other hand has made the media and journalists victims of the endemic chauvinism, parochialism and sectionalism that now characterizes the media in Africa, most especially Nigeria.

### *Unconducive Legal Environment*

The African environment has not been conducive for the mass media to promote democratic ideals among the people, because the laws and constitutions of the land have not allowed unhindered access to information by journalists, so as to promote accountability and transparency by government and public servants. Unfortunately many countries in Africa including Nigeria and a majority of the Arab states have failed to entrench press freedom in their constitution. For instance, Nigeria is yet to pass the Freedom of Information Bill. The legal mechanisms that could aid access to information in government institutions are not in place. (Isola, 2008:27). Several media establishments and journalists have been maltreated by the governments in power in several African countries for publishing the truth that puts the government in bad light. In Nigeria, for instance, the Zamfara state government fired the managing director of the state owned newspaper, Mallam Bashir SandaGasau for criticizing President Musa Yar'Adua (Vanguard August 18<sup>th</sup>p.18). Similarly the National Broadcasting Commission suspended Channels Television license leading to the closure of channels television office in Lagos and Abuja and the arrest and detention of 5 members of staff of the organization. This was as a result of a broadcast report purportedly originating from the News Agency of Nigeria that President Musa Yar'Adua may resign on health grounds (Vanguard September 18<sup>th</sup>2008, P.1). In Egypt, the level of freedom for media practitioners is low. Journalists are constantly facing constant physical harassment, threat and assault by state agents. The same scenario exists in Algeria, Sudan, India, Morocco and Libya because there is no freedom of information law which could enhance media access to public information (Isola, 2008:26). Nigeria just recently passed the Freedom of Information Bill, thereby enhancing media access to public information and promoting accountability and transparency by government and public servants. However, the commitment of African government to liberalize media access to public information has been limited by the lack of growth of community media in Africa (Isola, 2008:28). Apart from few countries in Southern Africa, (Botswana, South Africa, Malawi, Namibia) and some countries in West Africa (Ghana, Senegal , MaLY'etc) the licensing process for community radio has been inhibited. Partly due to the rising wave of religious fanaticism, ethnic militias, international team/group, that can destabilize the state using radio.

#### *Military Interventions in Politics*

In the event of a coup, the mass media are the first victims. In Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Burkina Faso and GuineaBisau, the military has disrupted democratically elected regimes and taken over the reigns of government. According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992:183), several years of military rule have militarized the civilians just as the soldiers have become part of the varying undisciplined masses of citizens with warped values about democracy and national development. The military tend to relegate accountability to the background in their discharge of national assignments, and this has brought them into conflict with the media, the watchdog of society.

#### *Religious Pluralism*

Africa is a mulireligious continent and religion has been a source of stress to democracy in many African countries including Nigeria. Even though religion and democracy are neither antithetical nor mutually exclusive there are practices that are rampant in Nigeria and some Arab states such as religious fanaticism, aggressive proselytization and social

insensitivity, intolerance, exclusivity, bigotry, competing claims of superiority of one religion over others have created a “we” and “they” syndrome that tend to undermine the growth of true democratic culture and the sustenance of democratic values and norms. In some cases, the mass media has taken sides in handling reports and comments about religion and this has further aggravated the crises (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:174).

### *Inadequate Training of Journalists*

The mass media on their own cannot design and produce messages or programmes on democracy, only journalists do. There is a yawning gap in the capacity of media personnel to design and produce political education programmes on democracy, its basic tenets and principles so that the masses can be empowered to checkmate the politicians and monitor the process and outcome of democratic consolidation in African states. The schools of journalism need to integrate democratic concepts into their curricula to sensitize and empower journalists in training.

### **Prospects for the Future**

The most crucial factors for the sustenance of democratic governance in Africa would consist of the enthronement of a popular sovereignty that touches the daily lives of the populace, gives meaning to the notion of citizenship, and goes beyond the constitutionally defined form of rule (Olukoshi 1998:38), for democracy can only survive in the continent if and when it becomes a lived experience that is worth defending. Political affairs and social life should be organized and conducted in such a way that allows for effective access to decision making for all and sundry and for an equitable distribution of the fruits of democracy among the various social groups and strata in society. As Berman (1998:339) rightly observed, most of Africa has failed to develop a culture of commonwealth and public interest that transcends ethnicity and is grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of unknown and unseen others. Against this background, Wiredu (1997:308-311) has suggested that Africans revisit the idea of “consensual democracy” as a possible solution to stalling majoritarian democracy. Consensual democracy as practiced in the traditional Ashanti system was by the consent and subject to the control of the people as expressed through their representatives. Thus while majoritarian democracy might be based on consent without consensus, the Ashanti system and the “IgboEnweEze Legacy” (Onwucheli, 2000) in South Eastern Nigeria, ensured that consent was negotiated on the principle of consensus. Popular democracy requires responsible leaders and enlightened followers who recognize the correlation between democratic practices and socioeconomic development that focuses on the social welfare of the people, reinforces political and cultural pluralism, emphasizes democratic accountability, guarantees the protection of human and peoples’ rights and ensures representation for competing interests in the political process (Olukoshi, 1998:34-3 5).

### **New Media and Democracy in Africa**

According to Banda and Tettey (2009), decade after the introduction of ICTs, questions about access, inequality, power and the quality of available information are still valid. The value of

new media lies in the extent to which they mesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion and expression.

Discussions of new media often disregard the unusual African terrain, which defies many of the technological innovations said to be reconfiguring the structures and processes of communication globally. This includes poor telecommunication networks in most parts of Africa, resulting in low levels of Internet usage. Nevertheless, online communities are emerging across Africa. And, although they are mostly among the elites, they show Africans taking advantage of new technology to advance their own identities and agendas.

The experience of democracy and communication in Africa can be analyzed in terms of three models: (1) diffusion/modernization (viewing the media as agents of modernity); (2) dependency/dissociation (viewing new media technology as a continuation of 'Third World' dependence on the West); and (3) participatory-communication (emphasizing participation, cultural identity, empowerment and dialogue).

It is important to consider the type of democracy sought and the technology/ies required. Morrisett (2003) identifies democratic uses of new technology as:

*Access:* Problems of access in African countries include power and technical deficiencies, the suspicion of technology transfer leading to increased dependency on the West, and struggles over control.

*Information and education:* While the quantity of online content has increased, its quality remains doubtful. Regulatory problems are likely.

*Discussion:* Institutional affiliations restrict participation. Further, online discussion currently seems to reflect rather than to challenge existing institutions (such as gender norms).

*Deliberation:* This is hindered in Africa by lack of access to technology, rigid structures of organizational and political decision-making, and people's economic struggles.

*Choices and action:* Alternative public spheres are emerging that are structured around interest-based communities. These may not intend to generate sustained action, but arguably communication is itself an action.

*The development of ICTs varies across different countries in Africa:*

In South Africa and Nigeria, there are significant challenges to introducing e-governance. It is, nevertheless, contributing to good governance.

In Kenya, new media may have the potential to monitor and mobilize political activity and encourage political engagement. However, they can also reinforce the position of those in power.

In Zimbabwe, news organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and ordinary people are using the Internet and mobile phones in information-gathering, dissemination and presentation to promote democracy and human rights. Quality and regulation are issues here.

In francophone Africa, the Internet has enhanced citizen engagement through critical public debates, more access to official information and more interaction of local CSOs with their counterparts abroad.

In Egypt, NGOs have used their websites to examine socioeconomic and political development – corruption, human rights issues and lack of democratic expression.

In Uganda and Zambia, ICT projects targeted at women often privilege the Internet when, in fact, many more women have access to mobile phones.

While new media technologies have a role in African democracy, their potential must be questioned in light of the continent's economic, political and cultural realities. Systems of political communication in most African countries remain centralized. However, while African governments try to monopolize public spaces of popular expression, new spaces of freedom and dissent have been formed. Other findings include the following:

Elitist and marginalized groups use ICTs for socio-political as well as economic purposes. They operate transnationally, and have become versatile political agents over whom states have less and less control.

ICTs may be leading to the erosion of African values and of their role in building democratic institutions that are appropriate for the African context.

Africans in diaspora settings use the Internet for political discussion about their own countries.

In the Great Lakes region, ICTs have helped local journalists create a better understanding of complex conflict situations, enabling them to contribute to peace building efforts.

#### Summary



Media constitutes as the fourth pillar of democracy. The role of the media is vital in generating a democratic culture that extends beyond the political system and becomes engrained in the public consciousness over time. Media is supplying the political information that voters base their decisions on. They identify problems in our society and serve as a medium for deliberation. They also serve as watchdogs that we rely on for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who have power. Media is vital in generating a democratic culture that extends beyond the political system and becomes engrained in the public consciousness over time. The role of media in a democracy is as crucial as that of the politicians and should never be underestimated.

The role of the media in the consolidation of Democracy in any particular country is facilitative, supportive and determined by the nature of the society itself. To be effective, the media need an enabling environment. Since most media establishments are government owned and controlled by politicians with political biases and leanings, the involvement and participation of the private sector and civil society organizations would go a long way in achieving a balance. In carrying out their functions, the media must not be merely a mirror of society, passively reporting events.

They must act as the watchdog of society and the instigators of positive change. But to effectively perform these roles, the media should be independent and given a free hand to perform within the ethics of their profession even when they are owned by private individuals, the government and non- governmental. The media must also operate in a responsible manner, by exercising a strong sense of fair play and a deep respect for truth in the handling of news and opinions. Above all, the media must operate an effective system of self-monitoring and self-supervision.

Media act as a catalyst for democracy and development, helping to make public participation meaningful. If media is honest and committed in its job, democracy is bound to function more efficiently and the loopholes present in any democratic system can certainly be plugged to the fullest satisfaction of the people. On the contrary, if media is biased, corrupt and favours only a

particular party or few individuals, it can prove to be very dangerous for the smooth functioning of democracy. No one can become perfect and one can only strive to become so. The same holds true for our media also. Certainly there is still a lot of scope for improvement by which the media can rise upon the aspirations of the people for which it is primarily meant.

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