

# COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

## WEEK TEN: Mass Communication Policies in Africa

### INTRODUCTION

In this lecture, attempts have been made to understand mass communication policies in Africa and a case study of Kenya communication policies. According to Matumaini (2010), African media landscape took on a new configuration in the 1990s because of the increased cry for multi-party democracy and the privatization of media. Until the 1990s policy was dominated by national development goals guided by the state. The technological, political and economic shifts taking place in the 1980s and 1990s heralded, for many, a new paradigm in communication policy. Policy decisions now are dominated by the concepts of convergence and interlinking of different forms of media, concentration of ownership, self-regulation, and diversity in the patterns of media ownership, universal information access in the digital age and globalization.

Many question, however, whether there is a real transition to multiparty politics and solid “democratization” in most African countries.

#### Learning Outcomes



1. Understand Mass communication policies
2. Explain challenges of formulating communication policy in Africa
3. Critic some of the major problems with current policy formulations in Africa.
4. Application of mass communication policies in Africa: The case of Kenyan policies.

According to Matumaini (2010), the challenge of communication policy in Africa is to liberate its media institutions from a tendency toward centralized, statist, elite control inherited from the colonial past and at the same give the stimulus of freedom to entrepreneurs, movements of the civil society and religious traditions in a way that encourages accountability and responsiveness to the culture, society and aspirations in Africa. This can be done only in a process which brings together all the major sociocultural, political and ethnic traditions in a mutual dialogue and allows all to put forward their perspectives but seeking, as a prime goal, to create communication institutions that embody the common aspirations and needs of all in a given region or nation.

## **The challenges of formulating communication policy in Africa**

According to Matumaini (2010), the lack of a systematic approach in policy analysis Communication policy in Africa has been treated by a wide range of institutions and scholars: Ugboajah (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985); UNESCO, Yaounde, 1980); Boafo (1986); Uka Uche, (1989); Wilson (1987, 2005, 2008); Blake (1997); and especially Nyamnjoh (2005). The study of communication policy in particular countries has been extensive: Nigeria (Ugboajah, 1980); Ghana (Karikari, 1994; Alhassan, 2004); Cameroun (Ngwainmbi, 2002; Nyamnjoh, 2005); Zambia (Kasoma, 1990); Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (Kasoma, 1992); Tanzania (Kivikuru, 1990, 1994); South Africa (R. Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli & Muller, 1989; Louw, 1993; Horwitz, 2001). There also has been extensive discussion of policies regarding the deployment of new communication technologies (Noam, 1997; Mustafa & Brand, 1997; Ben Soltane, Fluck, Opolo-Mensah, & Salih, 2004; Etta & Elder, 2005; Guislain et al, 2005; White, 2009). However, with the complexity of the concept of communication policy one finds quite different methodological approaches in different authors. Each tends to deal with different issues which are vital in communication and development. Perhaps the one central theme in all of them is that Africa cannot continue to be dependent and exploited by the rich countries in the sector of communication (Wilson, 1987). On the other hand, no country in Africa has a holistic and integrated communication policy. The general trend is to have pieces of regulations, laws and guidelines on electronic media, print media, film, news agencies, and telecommunication, communication training and government information (Boafo, 1986, p. 39) The current trends in media analysis and communication policy in Africa pose several pertinent questions: why there is tension liberal rhetoric and sociologists revealing the lack of free democratic participation in African society? Why is there tension between African governments and media? (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 254). What is the future of public service broadcasting, commercial broadcasting, community media, alternative media and the new digital media? Are there realistic prospects that African nations will develop coherent communication policies? Cecil Blake's (1997) prototype policy framework for Africa rests on an optimistic view of promoting democracy in Africa. His model has as essential dimensions the liberalization of media and allowing the ownership of all subsectors of communication; access to information by all parties; encouraging investments and competition, setting up independent regulatory bodies, and providing training institutions to prepare personnel

for both public and private sectors on a “free” basis. (Nyamnjoh 2005, p. 269). Nyamnjoh argues that the main problem in Africa is forming an independent communication authority. The governments should cease attempts to maintain monopoly over media houses, public opinion and professional training (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 271). Also, the continual attempts of political leaders to coopt journalists and other leaders in public opinion is a threat to media freedom. For instance, the government of Nigeria frequently attempted to “buy off” the outstanding journalists in the country to silence them. Again, the Nigerian government adopted the policy of appointing influential critics from media to top posts within the government. This trend is found in many governments in Africa (Uka Uche, 1989, p. 137). The future of communication policy will depend on how the African states form policies for economic development, promotion of public interests and opportunities for private concern (Uka Uche, 1989, p. 273). However, forming a regulatory body is not enough. What is important are the representation of all major actors related to the media in decisions and fair procedures of appointment. There must be clear definition of the roles of the regulatory agencies, the powers, goals, and to whom it is accountable. Moreover, to insure that the communication policies are created with clear purposes, the process of formulation must be open to a balanced combination of economic, political, social and technological capacities among expert consultants. (Hills, 2003, p. 39; Freedman 2008, p. 1; Soltane et al, 2004, p. 50).

### **The diverse processes of policy formulation in Africa**

Matumaini (2010), argues that it is difficult to describe the historical factors and political processes of communication policy because the contexts are so different. The tendency of some scholars to ignore the legacy left by colonial administrators, especially overlooking the legal and institutional framework left by colonial governments, leaves the history weak and incomplete. In fact, if one is to trace the history of communication policy, one must find in colonial government official publications the genesis of African communication policies. The print media and broadcasting were established in the colonial period primarily to transmit news, information and entertainment programs to colonial rulers. The aim was to enable Europeans in Africa to maintain links with the metropolitan countries (Boafo, 1991, p. 105; Kilimwiko, 2009, p. 65). Even today much of the colonial regulation and legislation, often quite repressive, is still operative. Much of the early legislation after independence was a continuation of the colonial policy, and most of the communication and media policies today are modeled and structured on the colonial heritage

(Wilcox, 1975, pp. 1, 134; Davidson, 1992, pp. 318-319; Umeh & Andranovich, 2005, pp.161-162). The broadcasting, in many instances, continues to be state-owned, government-subsidized and urban based. All major newspapers and broadcasting are usually emanated from the capital cities which were the seat of colonial government (Bourgault, 1995, p. 42). Most colonial press systems are still modeled on the colonial structures and attitudes. In fact the colonial governments of France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and England introduced a kind of authoritarian press philosophy by suppressing the development of indigenous press (Wilcox, 1975, p. 134). The Yaounde Declaration (1980), a major policy reference point which we will discuss more in detail, states that the major problem in policy is that African media institutions are the outcome of the colonial heritage, and communication structures and still conform to the old colonial patterns, ignoring the needs and aspirations of the people, Independence has not always been followed by a decolonization of cultural life, mode of thinking, and communication structure. The current communication structure still conform to the old colonial patterns and not to the needs and aspirations of the African people (Yaounde Declaration, 1980, p.1) In this colonial legacy, there are six different information communities: South Africa, Portuguese Africa, British East Africa, British West Africa, French West Africa and Magreb regions. Part of the differences in these regions, for example, the press laws, can be traced back to different colonial regimes (Churchill, 1991, pp. 21-22). Also separating these information communities are the four major language groups of Africa - English, French, Portuguese and Arab - which often imply major differences in media traditions, Added to this are the influences of the transnational languages such as Swahili, Hausa and Yoruba. Underlying the language differences are ethnic differences, cultural heritages, different histories and cultural-literary traditions. All this is an inheritance which somehow must be respected in national communication policy. The plurality of languages can be a platform for mutual enrichment through modern communication media. South Africa is an example of a nation which has incorporated language differences into national communication policy. Thus, the plurality of languages must be given full weight in establishing any rational network of communication in societies where ethnic diversity often necessitates the use of more than one language (Yaounde Declaration, DG/80/18). Religion is another component which influences communication policy in Africa. For instance the activities of the churches have established both national and transnational communication centers. The Nairobi-based communication department of the World of Council of Churches is an example. It prepares radio programs and newspapers

and sends them to different parts of Africa. The churches and Islamic organizations manage media production houses which are responding to the cultural and educational needs of the people, especially the marginalized poor, in a way that no other institutions are able to do (Churchill, 1991, p. 23) Technical capability is another component influencing communication policy. The African continent lacks modern technical facilities such as satellites. There are not enough highly trained technicians and engineers for maintenance of equipment. The dependence on donor agencies for technical support is never without its political, economic and cultural conditions and maintains a form of colonialism (Churchill, 1991, p. 23). As the NWICO debate brought out, the transnational news agencies must be dealt with in shaping media policy related to the political and cultural integration of different nations. The present media organization tends to serve a relatively small urban elite. The Standard group, based in East Africa, has had a transnational influence. After independence it started by operating from London and circulated in about thirty countries in Africa. Indirectly, this tendency formed a common conscience and aspirations (Churchill, 1991, p. 24). African nations cannot simply copy policy guidelines from the developed nations or even from other nations in the developing South. Every African nation must base its policy on its own traditional cultural forms, its cultural values and its national development goals. National, social and cultural integration has to be a fundamental goal. The exclusion of vast numbers of rural people from significant access to information and communication must be taken into consideration.

### **Some of the major problems with current policy formulations**

Kwame Boafo has pointed out some of the major difficulties that need to be dealt with (Boafo, 1986, pp. 40-41):

- (1) Many communication policies are, at best, a random accumulation of official directives, ad hoc legislation, decrees aimed at specific problems or even pronouncements of traditional rulers who insist on being heard. Policy seems not to be based on any comprehensive research, analysis of needs and comprehensive planning.
- (2) Some communication regulations and policies have been introduced in response to hurried reaction to some events or crisis.
- (3) The approach has been piece meal, compartmentalized and norms of professional responsibility and goals.

(4) Many communication policies have not been formulated on the basis of careful deliberations and broad consultation with individuals and agencies expected to implement or be affected by the policies.

(5) There is a growing tendency of communication policy to be based on the personality cult of powerful political leaders.

(6) There is little effort to incorporate communication strategies and processes into national development and planning.

(7) Hardly any policies have been devised in any African country to systematically integrate the traditional means of communication with the modern telecommunication systems and policies do not encourage use of traditional communication media.

For a national communication policy to overcome these problems there must be a united effort of all major stakeholders, especially those who are involved with communication planning, communication professional groups and those involved with major media institutions. Concept of Communication Policy There is very little agreement on the concept of media policy in the major publications in this area. Media policy includes all kinds of proposals and strategies used by governments, media corporations, international policy institutions, as well as organizations and individuals in the media sector. Moreover, media policies written in official documents might not be the ones that are actually carried out, for example, by regulatory agencies. Malm and Wallis suggest that there are two basic types of policy: those formulated and policies actually practiced (Malm & Wallis, 1992, p. 21). Communication policy entails every aspect of communication systems: media, interpersonal communication, traditional means of communication, content of the message, audience and all economic, social and political and technological factors. The history of the concept of communication policy can be traced back to 1920 with the emergence of the electronic media. Before this era, the printing press and traditional media existed but nobody worried about the ownership, control and benefits to the society. The underlying logic was that anyone could establish a press and say whatever he wanted. In this period there were some guidelines that were informal but accepted by the people. In so doing they agreed on some guidelines, such as freedom of the press, but depending on the authority of the area. Most authors would agree that there are three main phases in the evolution of media policy. The first is the emerging communications industry policy (1920s to 1945). This is the phase of transition from a period of virtually no official guidelines except a general policy of media freedom. It was dominated by the collection of ad hoc measures to facilitate the services of technological

innovation especially radio and television. This period was technologically oriented rather than by the nature and impact of the message on the public. The second phase commenced in 1945 to 1980/90. This is the public-service-media paradigm. Scholars and media practitioners started to question the role of media because politicians, dictators, propagandists misused it as a catalyst for the Second World War. This phase is dominated by sociopolitical factors. The third phase is the searching for a new communication policy model. The present phase, dating from the 1990s, is characterized by convergence and interlinking of different forms of media, concentration of ownership, and increased toleration of monopoly. The future is uncertain because of the new social phenomenon in communication policy derived from advancement in technology and the impact of globalization (McQuail, 2000, pp. 21-32). The current general goal of communication policy is still the same as has emerged since the 1930s, to serve the public interest. However, the content of public interest has changed. The economic welfare has become more important in comparison with political, socio-cultural welfare. There are questions which need to be addressed worldwide but particularly in Africa (McQuail, 2000, p. 32):

- (1) Whether to promote market dynamics or stability.
- (2) What balance to maintain between the roles of public and private sectors.
- (3) How to finance different aspects of the public sector.
- (4) Which policy instruments to use for what purpose.
- (5) Whether and how far to direct policy and control the content and structure of media
- (6) Whether to seek a coherent policy for all sectors or to redraw the map in a completely new way.
- (7) Whether to concentrate or disperse regulatory power (and policy making itself).
- (8) Whether to maintain the national policy or to enter into wider international regulation agreements.
- (9) How to maintain ultimate political control without government intervention.

According to Matumaini (2010), the history of communication policy is a process of gradual, sometimes barely perceptible, moves towards integration, that is, toward the perception of coherent systems in communication. The “official” description of communication policies outlined during a meeting of experts on communication and planning under UNESCO held in Paris in 1972 states

“communication policies are a set of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems” (UNESCO, 1972). The orientation of policy is fundamental and long range, although policies may have operational implications of short-term significance. Communication policies are the outcome of the society’s general approach to communication: political ideologies, social and economic conditions and values. Communication policies exist in every society, sometimes they are latent and disjointed rather than being clear and harmonized. This concept of policy was the introduction of a general move by UNESCO in the 1970s and 1980s to promote the development of communication policies in Africa. UNESCO commissioned a series of national communication policy studies in Zambia (Kasoma, 1990, 1992), Nigeria (Ugboajah, 1980) and in other African countries. The attempt to promote policy making in the developing world, especially in Latin America and Africa, was at the heart of the debate regarding the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The promotion of policy making by UNESCO largely ended with the end of the NWICO movement.

## **THE CASE STUDY OF KENYA COMMUNICATION POLICIES**

Broadcasting in Kenya traces back to 1927 with the advent of the East African Broadcasting Corporation (EABC) which relayed BBC news to the colonies (Mbeke 2008, cited in Wanyama 2015). English Radio Broadcasting began in 1928. The broadcasts targeted white settlers who monitored news from their home and other parts of the world. First radio broadcasts targeting Africans came during the World War II to inform parents and relatives of African soldiers what was happening at the war front.

According to Wanyama (2015), English broadcasts continued until the beginning of the war when Asian and African programmes were introduced. In 1953, the first broadcast service was created for Africans. African Broadcasting Services (ABS) carried programmes in Swahili, Dholuo, Kikuyu, Kinandi, Kiluhya, Kikamba and Arabic.

In 1954 a commission was set up by the colonial government to look into the future of broadcasting in Kenya. As a result of the recommendations of that commission, Kenya Broadcasting Services (KBS) was established in 1959 and regional stations were set up in Mombasa (Sauti ya Mvita), Nyeri (Mount Kenya Station) and Kisumu Station in Nyanza (at the time comprising the current Western Province and Kericho Districts.)

In 1970 a new television station was opened in Mombasa to relay programmes and produce local dramas, music cultural and other programmes touching on coastal issues. In 1989, the Voice of Kenya reverted back to Kenya Broadcasting Corporation through an Act of Parliament.

The legal instruments governing the press in Kenya derive from every kind of legal process in every branch of law including public, private, criminal, commercial, and administrative. Although other methodological approaches to their analysis are not inconceivable, in the following pages the law on press control in Kenya will be analyzed from the standpoint of the rationale for the introduction of the various legal instruments. It is submitted that four separate but related reasons have been used to justify the introduction of laws which curtail press freedom. This paper therefore strives to establish the status of broadcast media regulation and control in Kenya (Wanyama 2015).

### ***Formal regulation***

Mbeke (2008, cited in Wanyama 2015) asserts that laws governing the media in Kenya are fragmented and exist in different sections of civil and criminal laws. The three sources of press law in Kenya include the Constitution of Kenya, the Statutory Law; and the Common Law. The Constitution of Kenya formally promulgated in 2010 is the supreme law of Kenya and guarantees the right to freedom of expression: the law does not however mention freedom of press and other media specifically; provides limitations of the fundamental rights and freedoms under vague circumstances thus allowing for violations of same rights (Mbeke 2008).

The relevant sections of the Statutory Law of Kenya, some of which are controversial, that deal with media include:

The Defamation Act, Cap 36; The Penal Code, Cap 63; The Books and Newspapers Act, Cap 11; Copyright Act, Cap 130; Preservation of Public Security Act, Cap 57; Public Order Act, Cap 56; Film and Stage Plays Act, Cap 222 (1962); Chief's Authority Act, Cap 128; Official Secrets Act, Cap 187 of 1968; Police Act, Cap 84; Armed Forces Act, Cap 199; Communication Commission of Kenya Act of 1998; Kenya Broadcasting Act, Cap 221 of 1998, ICT Act of 2007 and the Media Act, 20072. The key media regulators are the Ministry of Information and ICT, Communication Authority of Kenya, Media Council of Kenya, Kenya Film Commission among others. There exist a communication policy – the ICT policy and several other sessional papers that provide regulation framework (Makali 2004).

### ***The Colonial Era (1895-1962)***

Politics and economic interests by the colonial government and white settlers provided a legal and policy framework for the media. The nationalist movement, the Mau Mau war, the 1952 Emergency and Her Majesty's government commitment to give Kenya independence also influenced colonial laws and policy towards media.

The authoritarian colonial government's dominant perception of the Press was always that of an unnecessary evil that deserved close supervision and control (Makali 2004). Initially, the Press was merely a vehicle for disseminating government information to the citizenry especially the White settler communities. However, the colonial government adopted draconian laws such as the Newspapers' Ordinance (1906) to deal with harsh political realities of the time. As early as 1920s, nationalist movements and Press had started opposing paternalistic colonial policies such as forced alienation of land, forced labor and taxation and racial segregation.

The colonial government feared a free and thriving nationalist press that acted as the mouthpiece for political independence. It enacted the Penal Code in 1930, the Emergency Order in Council in 1939, repealed The Newspaper Ordinance in 1950 to control alleged seditious nationalist publications such as *Sauti ya Mwafrika*, *Uhuru was Mwafrika*, *African Leader*, *Inoororia Agikuyu* among others. The breakout of the Mau Mau war and the Declaration of Emergency in 1952 gave the colonial government the excuse to ban all indigenous publications and to intensify propaganda against the nationalist movement (Makali 2004).

### ***The Kenyatta Era (1962-1978)***

The first President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta and his nationalist colleagues who took power upon independence knew the power of the Press. They set out to manipulate and control the media for propaganda purposes (Mbeke 2008, cited in Wanyama 2015). The factors that shaped media law and policy during the Kenyatta era included the urgent need for national unity and development, political rivalry and ideological issues surrounding media ownership. The Kenyatta government preferred a co-opted media that would contribute to nation building and development. The government was opposed to an independent and foreign owned media playing a watchdog role that could cause disillusionment towards the young government. While the independent government

nationalized KBS in 1964 and named it Voice of Kenya (VOK), its intentions for the print media were still born.

### ***The Moi Era (1978-2002)***

The second president of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi, ascended to power in October 1978 following the death of Jomo Kenyatta. According to Mbeke (2008, cited in Wanyama 2015), several issues influenced Moi's attitude towards the mass media, particularly the intense political rivalry between Kenyatta and Odinga, an attempted military coup in 1982 military coup, economic recession that led to International Monetary Fund's adjustment programs, and popular agitation for economic and political liberalization and globalization. The eight-hour battle for the control of the microphone at KBC during the 1982 attempted coup especially hardened Moi's position towards the mass media.

The government took a dictatorial approach by restricting and limiting political freedoms making Kenya a *de Jure* political state. Opposition was criminalized and open clampdown on critical press enhanced. The government harassed the media through sedition trials of the underground press and later banned independent and critical publications such as *Beyond* magazine in 1988; the *Financial Review* in 1989; *Development Agenda* and *Nairobi Law Monthly* in August 1989 September 1990 respectively. Between 1988 and 1990 about 20 publications were banned in Kenya (Mbeke 2008, cited in Wanyama 2015).

*The repeal of section 2A of the constitution in 1991 – which had until then ensured one party rule – not only ushered in plural politics but also precipitated the liberalization of media and communication sector. The introduction of multiparty politics in 1991 widened the scope of political and press freedom and led to the proliferation of independent newspapers and magazines such as Economic Review and Finance (Mbeke 2008).*

*The pressure to review media laws increased and Moi reluctantly caved in to pressure during the 1997 Inter Party Parliamentary Group talks to repeal sections 52, 53, 54, 57, 58, 66, 67 and 121 of the State Law that hindered freedom of expression, assembly and which criminalized the free flow of published documented information in Kenya.*

Throughout the attempts to review media laws, there was a general lack of linkage between task forces and bills on media law and telecommunication law. Telecommunication services, characterized by political interference, excessive controls, low universal access to information, low internet connectivity, low quality and high prices, had been neglected for a long time and were limited to major towns to the exclusion of rural communities.

### ***The Kibaki Era (2003-2012)***

President Kibaki came to power on the promise of change in the 2002 Presidential Elections. His government was largely seen as a reformist one that would decisively address the legal, regulatory and policy flaws that had undermined governance and crippled social-economic development in Kenya. He took power when the country was in recession and the economy recording negative growth. His priority was to deliver a new constitution within 100 days and part of that package contained progressive laws on media. Indeed, the Chapter six on the Bill of Rights Part two; Sections 48, 49, 50 and 51 of the proposed constitution stipulated the rights to freedoms of religion, belief and opinion; freedom of expression; freedom of the media; and freedom of access to information respectively (Mbeke 2008, cited in Wanyama 2015). The Kibaki administration also prepared the Freedom of Information Bill (2007) that would deal a death blow to the Official Secrets Act and improve access to official information and governance. Kibaki's contributions to free media space was slowly getting watered down by the regime under the leadership of Uhuru Kenyatta.

### ***The Uhuru Era (2013 - Date)***

According to Wanyama (2015). Uhuru Kenyatta ascended to power following a closely contested election held in March 2013. After assuming office, Uhuru appeared to switch from the traditional policies to what is popularly termed as progressive ones. Kenyatta switched from the West and tended towards the East for economic interests. Traditionally the relationship between the Kenyan press and the state has in the past been cold, and suspicious. A few months after ascending to power, Kenyatta invited media stakeholders including editors and senior journalists to statehouse for breakfast. To many analysts this presented a reformed face of government – a government ready to work with the media. This glory did not, however, last for long. Barely a few weeks later,

journalists were thrown out of parliament citing misrepresentation of facts. This marked the beginning of a fresh row between a freshly elected government and the press.

### *KICA 2013 – Threats*

The controversial communication amendment bill was signed into law by President Uhuru Kenyatta on December 4, 2013. This law severely restricts press freedom and breaches the constitutional protections granted journalists. The controversial law removed the Complaints Commission from the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) and assigned those powers to the Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK), which is the rebranded body that took over the functions of Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) (Wanyama 2015).

#### Summary



Public service broadcasting should have the following characteristics:

- (1) Provide quality, independent programming that contributes to a plurality of opinions and an informed public;
- (2) Provide comprehensive news and current affairs programming, which is impartial, accurate and balanced;
- (3) Provide a wide range of broadcast materials that strike a balance between programming of wide appeal and specialized programs that serve the needs of different audiences;
- (4) Be universally accessible and serve all the people and regions of the country, including minority groups;
- (5) Provide educational programs, especially programs directed towards children; and
- (6) Promote local program production, including through minimum quotas for original productions and material produced by independent producers. (www. Global Campaign for Freedom of Expression, 2004, London, article 19, org.tanzania information and broadcasting policy, 15/02/2010)

The main purpose which law serves in relation to the broadcast media in Kenya is the function of control. This is neither unexpected nor is it unique to Kenya. After all, control of social institutions is a popular focus of all states; and quite obviously, some of this control serves the purpose of securing the common good of society. The idea of press control cannot be quarreled with in principle; but why it is done, and how it is done deserves serious discussion and comment. The new Kenya Information and Communication law perhaps should be amended.

This paper strongly holds the belief that freedom of broadcast media and of the press in general is likely to be curtailed under the new law.

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