

An Analysis of Communication Policies in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This analysis looks at Kenya's communication policies from:

- (a) The extent to which communication as an issue has achieved status on Kenya's institutional agenda.
- (b) The nature of communication structures.
- (c) Recommendations based upon the analysis of the situation.

Specified recommendations have been made in relation to the following:

- (a) Strengthening of existing communication policies or the formulation of new ones.

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- (b) Clarification of existing policies wherever deemed necessary,
 - (c) Development of modalities for the implementation of such policies,
 - (d) Devising feedback mechanisms for the determination of impact of policies that have been implemented, and
 - (e) Sharpening the criterion instrument for the impact of policies that have been implemented.
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Une Analyse des Politiques de Communication au Kenya.

RESUME

Cette analyse étudie les politiques de communication du Kenya partir à partir des critères suivants:

- a) La communication et son statut institutionnel au Kenya.
- b) La nature des structures de communication.
- c) Les Recommandations basées sur l'analyse de la situation des recommandations spécifiques sont faites pour:
 - a) Renforcement des politiques de communication existantes ou la formulation de nouvelles.
 - b) Clarification des politiques existantes là où c'est nécessaire.
 - c) Mise au point des modalités pour l'exécution de ces politiques.
 - d) Creation de mécanismes de feedback pour déterminer l'impact des politiques mises en oeuvre et
 - e) explication plus précise des critères des politiques qui ont été menées et leur impact.

The Institutional Agenda:

The only mention of communications as a public policy issue in Kenya's current five year National Development Plan relates to the establishment of basic infrastructural facilities throughout the country. This approach to the communications issue also typifies previous development plans and suggests problems inherent in the way the country has chosen to only address one dimension of a multifaceted area of national development.

Such plans are an indication of issues and goals that have been taken seriously enough to be put on the country's institutional agenda. They form the agenda for political action and carry problems and issues which public policy makers will address.

Relatively speaking, the communication issue is at present hardly anywhere to be seen on the institutional agenda. As such the first prerequisite for communication policy making is yet to be met.

National obstacles:

Problems that achieve institutional status usually have Image potential, meaning that politicians expect important political mileage from dealing with them.¹

Problems also achieve agenda status through crisis situations, protest activity, lobbying by powerful interest groups or media coverage. None of these mechanisms have worked well for communications. Not many politicians expect this issue to have electoral quality and it is difficult to imagine crisis or demonstrations over any communication problems. Few, if any, interests will stage communication lobbies and in general, the mass media pay little attention to themselves.

Another problem relates to the fact that official policy makers are legislators, executives, administrators and the judiciary. According to different political systems, they will have different levels of influence. In Kenya the executive is the decisive policy maker. It may be questioned however, whether communication policy making can be taken seriously if left to one powerful figure and his interests.

Where the administrative agencies initiate policy, usually institutional, sectoral and bureaucratic interests determine this policy more than substantial considerations.²

Most lawmakers are poorly equipped to deal meaningfully with communication questions, since these are inherently interdisciplinary, technically complex and socially sensitive.

International obstacles

Two major developments in the international arena that militate strongly against national communication policy making are privatization and liberalization.³

An emerging policy principle is more market less state. Powerful donor countries such as the USA, UK and France and donor agencies such as the IMF, USAID and the World Bank recommend this strategy as an effective way towards economic development.

A problem caused by this strategy is the way it opens doors to foreign capitalist interests while at the same time allowing profit considerations to override public interest.

Demands from the West for greater liberalization of trade in the service industry have grown with the widespread use of computer and telecommunication technology. It is the West that has taken the lead in exporting services such as advertising, market research and data processing and any liberalization or removal of international trade barriers at this time serves their interests.

Communication Structures

Even though there is very little in development plans to suggest that Kenya is addressing communication issues in all their dimensions, one can discern government interventions in the country's history that attempted to harness them to the development effort.

This section of the report analyses them in terms of their significance to policy formulation. At independence, it was widely assumed that modern communication systems could be introduced by making a few adaptations in the models offered by industrialized countries based on their established traditions of the press, broadcasting and other media.

This first generation of thought was very much influenced by the diffusion-modernization thesis of Lerner, Schramm and Rogers in the 1950s and early 1960s. Development was conceived of as the transfer of technology from the industrialized nations to the modernizing elite sector of the less industrialized countries and through these elites, to the disadvantaged lower status urban and rural groups.

The role of communication was to provide channels through which the techniques, life style, motivations and attitudes of the modernizing sector could be diffused to the more backward traditional sectors. It was believed that once broadcasting hardware and the bureaucratic organization for transferring information were introduced, especially mass media, the technical and cultural capacities of the elite sector would be made available to the disadvantaged sector and social inequalities would gradually disappear.

The major obstacle to communication was considered to be within the peasants and their traditionalism and inherent resistance to modernization.⁴ The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was the government's main arm for pursuing these goals. Through its various units it formed an important link between the government and the people.

It was responsible for informing the people of government policies and decisions of what was happening in the nation and the world at large, of educating them, inspiring and mobilizing them for national development.⁵ What was not clearly perceived at the onset was the true nature of communication. By the late 1960s and early 1970s it was becoming increasingly evident that this conceptual approach to communication and development ran counter to the central goals. Instead of encouraging integration, channeling resources to disadvantaged sectors for their greater economic productivity, promoting better use of natural resources and fostering a cultural identity capable of motivating the people, there was stultifying dependence in all areas and very disappointing economic performance.

As it turned out, the diffusion-modernization model was not a formula for the value-free, neutral channeling of technical information, but biased toward the values and hegemonic interest of the industrialized countries and the elite who were supposed to be channels of information.⁶

It actually worked towards reinforcing a post independence situation in which formal political authority was in the hands of Africans while the civil service, industry and agriculture remained predominantly in European control.⁷

The Kenyanisation policy which was adopted to redress the situation merely succeeded in establishing a new class of Africans sharing the privileges previously monopolized by others. They were all gaining from the power structure and had no interest in changing it. They included politicians, managers and directors of foreign corporations, civil servants and administrators of parastatal bodies, large farmers, clerical workers, skilled labourers and small holders.

Internationally, the government encouraged the integration of the Kenyan economy into the world capitalist system. Multinational corporations were offered favourable terms. The free flow of technology was encouraged: Tourism was promoted to the point where it became the second largest foreign exchange earner.⁸

Foreign aid and foreign missions were welcomed. Between 1969 and 1971, 14 per cent of Kenyan imports were financed by official aid. The policies favouring foreign enterprises had the effect of encouraging high rates of investment from abroad. UNCTAD estimated that 45 per cent of Kenyan investment in manufacturing was financed from abroad. Foreign control of industrial investment formed a greater proportion. Among manufacturing companies employing fifty or more workers, it is estimated that foreign companies accounted for 57 per cent of the gross product in 1967.⁹

The economic gains made by this strategy were undercut by problems of unemployment, under employment, maldistribution of income and poverty.¹⁰ Communication specialists in the 1970s began to propose new models that promised more equitable flows of information and greater integration of disadvantaged groups into the mainstream of development.

rural communities to the elite centre and then carry their definition down again with very little horizontal communication. In other words the elite define what is considered valid and valued information within the national system.

Many Third World governments hesitate at the thought of adopting an official policy of decentralisation because of the political risks it entails for weak central governments. The centralised commercial nature of conventional media structures also works against such efforts.

Modalities for Policy Formulation

It is important that the institutional agenda address these problems as comprehensively in a communication policy, as they do elsewhere.

It is also important to understand that communication policies are a set of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems. Their orientation is fundamental and long range although they are shaped in the context of a society's general approach to communication. Emanating from political ideologies; the economic and social conditions of the country and the values of which they are based, they strive to relate these to the real needs and prospective opportunities of communication.

At the national level a more specific approach to communication policy demands the formulation of coherent policies and their implementation through adequate institutional bodies. Policies should integrate formerly distinct plans in fields such as general technology, informatics, patent law, mass media and telecommunications.

Policies have to define development objectives, specify information needs, design principles of selection, produce guidelines for decisions, make projections regarding secondary impacts, propose institutional arrangements for the monitoring of technological applications and the control over innovations, and make provisions for careful screening of available human and physical resources.

- Unless one gets communication policy on the institutional agenda, the whole purpose of the exercise

becomes futile. The problems outlined earlier exist in some form in development plans. It is the manner in which they relate to communication that needs to be made clear.

- Policy making has to be based upon a serious database that enables a minimal level of resource assessment: an inventory of locally available resources, a projection of needs for imported resources and a scenario for resource development.
- Policy makers need to have some idea of what communication development entails: this needs the establishment of advisory boards and the organization of training courses.
- The institutional location and accountability of communication need to be defined: this implies the identification of the agencies to be involved and the construction of mechanisms for their co-ordination.
- The various indirect forms in which social actors other than official policymakers can participate in policy making needs to be explored and developed.
- Policy making needs the metapolicy exercise of reflecting on how measures could and should be implemented.
- Monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes should be a vital part of the process.¹²

Communication Structures

Communication policy, in promoting the strategy of self-reliance and decentralization, must consider four aspects of a national information system: function, resource inventory, structure content and control.

a) Function

If information systems are to develop in a way that contribute to self-reliance, there must be a balance in the functions of flexible adaptation, national integration and national information autonomy.

A national culture is a system of values and techniques that enables a people to best adapt to its particular environment. The information system,

especially mass popular radio, television and cinema should help shape the symbols and norms that enable people to continually adapt to and take advantage of their resources.

It has the further adaptive function of providing information for national collective decisions in response to problem solving. A truly adaptive decision taking process is possible if all groups that must deal with varying aspects of the physical and social environment have adequate information and can make known their needs at national level.

In this regard the move towards the establishment of all types of information sources ranging from libraries, archives, information centres and documentation centres should be taken seriously.

Information and documentation institutions are developing such services as networks, cooperative systems, clearing houses, inter-lending etc which facilitate careful co-ordination and supplementation for all information.

In addition individual institutions produce subject or area bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, etc. Through these services and systems, potential users get to know what literature exists on given subjects and its availability. These developments have been enhanced by the use of computers in information processing and the establishment of data banks.

Various institutions in Kenya have recently been set up or assigned to co-ordinate information production and dissemination covering sectoral and national interests. Some are wobbling on while others are still trying to define their roles.

On account of this and the problem of limited resources, they have yet to meet national expectations. Examples of such institutions include National Council for Science and Technology, Kenya National Library Services, the University of Nairobi, the Kenya Agricultural Documentation Centre.¹³

In view of the function these institutions are supposed to serve, resources, both financial and technical, should be put into ensuring that they get off the ground as quickly as possible.

b) *Resource Inventory*

The most important information for continual adaptation to the environment is experience, systematised knowledge, tradition, and motivating symbols which have developed over centuries. The most adequate media, philosophy and concepts of communication are those which are native.

The role of communication, information science and policy making should be to create an awareness of these and examine them to find ways they can be further used in development. Attempts to introduce more indigenous journalism and broadcasting formats are consistent with these goals. The decentralization of communication systems should be pursued as a way of making better use of native resources. Local radio and press are often much closer to the indigenous culture than the media located in large cities.

The adaptation to sophisticated electronic media, microprocessors and satellite technology toward such ends is viable especially since recent developments are making them more divisible and adaptable to more local less expert use. Local radio, low power TV, audio and video cassettes, small computers are commonplace examples of this. In the case of satellite communication and access to international computer data banks, the critical resource is not the hardware in itself but the local organization that links users to the receiver or terminal.

c) *Content, Structure and Control*

In the face of capital resources and technical expertise of transnational corporations and allied national monopoly interests, there is a particular need for clear public interest planning and decisive public controls.

Several steps are important in this regard:

- (1) determining the form and degree of national ownership and administration of radio, television, newspapers, publishing film

distribution, advertising agencies, information and computer industries and the manufacture of technical equipment.

- (ii) providing professional training within the country. Developing countries run the risk of having their information systems dominated by a few highly trained media professionals who are alienated from the mass of the people. It is important to look for ways of broadening the sense of competence in this area.

Regional Cooperation

Cooperation among developing countries at the continental, regional and subregional level complements the delinking policy. Developing nations must seek to replace dependency relationships with major powers by interchange amongst themselves.

The Organization of African Unity, established the Union of African News Agencies in 1963 and has been urging the implementation of a Pan African News Agency within its general structure even since. At present, a major obstacle to this regional news service is the weakness of national news agencies, the lack of professionally trained personnel and the lack of inexpensive transmission infrastructure.

Most important is the lack of a clear concept of what constitutes alternative news formats and journalistic styles most appropriate to the political, economic and cultural context of the south. Action needs to be initiated on a number of these problems. The Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States is another important regional initiative that has to be taken seriously.

Telecommunications plays an important role in the process of economic integration. The effort to create the basic infrastructure for establishing direct telecommunication links among member countries needs to be supported. The existing communication facilities were for connecting countries directly with their Western metropolises. Efforts to break this dependence link are in need of external funding.

A meeting of PTA journalists held in Lusaka, Zambia in March 1987 came up with additional recommendations regarding the role communication should play in promoting regional integration. In view of the difficulties journalists

face in obtaining information from the PTA Secretariat on PTA activities, the seminar recommended the establishment of a fully staffed information department headed by an experienced journalist employed at policy making level to supply information and documents to the mass media of the sub region.

The seminar noted with concern, the under-development of economic, finance and business journalism in the sub-region. To redress this problem the seminar recommended that the PTA Secretariat identify an existing institution within the sub-region which could be converted into a centre for the training of specialised reporters in the field of finance, economics and business.

The PTA, together with the Union of African Journalists, existing journalism training institutions and Chambers of Commerce and Industry needed to identify the type of economic, business and financial journalism training required and develop relevant curriculum for this field.

Regional cooperation in the area of informatics was outlined at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast in 1985 at a conference entitled "Informatics and Sovereignty: A contribution to the Lagos Plan of Action". The meeting declared that informatization demanded policies and programmes that:

- elaborated continental codes and programmes for reducing the external monopoly of information technologies and their application.
- formulated national and regional policies to ensure the definition and programming of priority target areas for the application of the technology.
- identify common fields in a regional framework and establish their relationship to available and developing informatics structures.
- create data banks by regional and sub regional co-operation or financial bodies within the respective areas of activity.
- establish on-going performance evaluation accompanied by research to enable the development of autonomous technologies.
- develop manpower training strategies.

The Union of National Radio and Television Organizations of Africa (URTNA) exists as a Pan African organization to provide a machinery for the exchange of radio and television programmes between African broadcasting organizations. The results of its endeavours so far have been impressive. URTNA programmes on VOK TV and Radio are popular and all indications suggest that this kind of exchange link should be intensified.

Instruments for Determining Impact of Policies

There are various methods for creating and organizing information about systems and the impact of policies on the environment past, present and future that enable one to identify the problems, needs which in turn become the basis for setting goals for adaptation strategies. In a general sense each of these tasks entails increasing understanding about interactions and relationships among these elements. The understanding in turn becomes the basis for the design of strategies for accomplishing goals.

The first task is to carry out a needs assessment exercise that determines what is required. A related task is audience analysis. Here one attempts to understand as much as possible about the people involved in the action, including those who benefit and those who play influential roles in planning and implementation.

The analysis of institutions and trends which shape the social environment and which determine both the way in which planning is done and the nature of the adaptation strategy chosen is important. So are the patterns of interaction among these elements in the environment.

A related third task is the analysis of policies which guide and constrain system development and the distribution and nature of political and economic power. This analysis includes a close examination of the values and ideology on which policy rests. This, in sum, is an analysis of the existing social image.

Analysis of the system which needs implementation requires assessment of system resources and capabilities. Also important is an understanding of current adaptation strategies. This requires the use of evaluation information, providing a concrete illustration of how the element of learning in the planning process is closely connected with the

analysis. In carrying out such tasks, one uses information about the past and present to project the nature of the environment and their policies into the future.

Five methods that are useful in analyzing impact of policies:

a) *Systems Analysis*

This is a fundamental method of understanding systems and environments, with emphasis on complex patterns of interaction among system and environment elements.

b) *Resource*

A key aspect of systems analysis is assessment of the resources available. The method is useful at all stages of planning and is concerned with identifying and assessing a wide range of resources.

c) *Trend extrapolation*

This is a widely used method for applying information about the past to project the future. It requires quantitative data. Expanded versions of the method incorporate more than one variable into their projections and assess the probable impact of future events on trends.

d) *Delphi*

The Delphi technique is also a projection method. However, instead of relying on past data for future projections, Delphi draws on the combined judgement of experts to identify future trends and events.

e) *Brainstorming*

The purpose of brainstorming is the generate creative thinking and the production of many ideas related to specific policy areas. As a method of

analysis brain-storming is useful in identifying system and environmental elements that are significant and in creating insights into the nature of these elements and their patterns of interaction.

End Notes

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