



Seeking Partners for Press Freedom Media Council of Tanzania and DEFIR Epilogue

By September 2011, the task force members recognized that securing buy-in for the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Editorial Independence, Freedom and Responsibility (DEFIR) would be a long process. The launch event that the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) had organized in March 2011—and the big-bang approach it represented—had not worked as expected. “Getting stakeholder support is a protracted process,” says Issa Shivji. “It cannot be a one-off initiative.”¹ Adds Wangethi Mwangi: “A broad-brush tactic will not do. You have to do it one step at a time and progressively consolidate your gains.”²

The process had already begun a few weeks earlier when task force members enlisted the support of Mwananchi Communications Limited (MCL), a leading publishing house in Tanzania, to publish a series of articles. The articles were to highlight the nuances of DEFIR and focus specifically on building grassroots support among newspaper readers. Written by task force members themselves, the articles would be in both English and Swahili; and published every week

¹ Author’s interview with Issa Shivji in Dar es Salaam on January 8, 2012. All further quotations from Shivji, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

² Author’s interview with Wangethi Mwangi in Dar es Salaam on January 8, 2012. All further quotations from Shivji, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

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by MCL in the op-ed pages of *The Citizen*, its English-language publication, and *Mwananchi*, the Swahili edition.

In mid-September, MCT showcased DEFIR for the first time outside Tanzania. It presented it at High Africa, “the largest annual gathering of African journalists,” at its three-day convention in Cape Town, South Africa.³ At the end of September, MCT held a round-table discussion on DEFIR among task force members and a group of editors, media owners and senior journalists in Dar es Salaam. The discussion led to a consensus on the “need to initiate dialogue to establish proper editorial policies in individual media houses.”⁴ It was an extension of the core objectives of DEFIR. Simultaneously, task force members started participating in television talk shows on media-related issues both within and outside Tanzania to drive home the message of DEFIR.

MCT received a shot in the arm in March 2012, when *Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo* (Chadema) became the first political party to sign and endorse DEFIR. John Mnyika, the party’s director of information and publicity and also a member of parliament for the Ubungo constituency in Dar es Salaam, praised DEFIR as a “declaration that not only outlines roles and responsibility of media owners and practitioners but also of politicians.”⁵ Pledging his party’s commitment to promote DEFIR, he said he was influenced by the op-ed pieces he read in *Mwananchi*.

In early June 2012, MCT organized a two-day summit, for the first time, of various media outlets in Tanzania at Morogoro, a city in the southern highlands 190 km west of Dar es Salaam. MCT was seeking their support for various initiatives, including DEFIR. The summit was attended by 40 editors from across the country.⁶

MCT launched the Swahili version of DEFIR at its National General Convention (NGC), an annual event held in mid-June 2012 at Mazizni, a beach resort in Zanzibar. The goal was to distribute copies of DEFIR to a larger audience and secure buy-in from across the mainstream media in Tanzania.⁷

³ For the Highway Africa website, see: <http://highwayafrica.wordpress.com/>

⁴ For more information, see: <http://mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/>

⁵ See: <http://mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/>

⁶ See: http://mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=604:media-challenged-to-drive-mcts-agenda&catid=99:mct-news-&Itemid=512

⁷ See: http://mct.or.tz/mediacouncil/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=607:mct-holds-symposium-and-ngc-in-zanzibar&catid=99:mct-news-&Itemid=512

MCT had also taken a stand to retain its voluntary status. Says John Kabudi, a task force member:

Voluntary compliance is, clearly, the strength of MCT. The stance is very idealistic but is also, in our view, very realistic. I believe that it is better to have two people who voluntarily comply with a document like DEFIR than to have 10 people who sign off under coercion. Why is it better? Because the two people will internalize it; DEFIR will then be part of them, part of their culture. The 10 people who sign under duress will always need some kind of policing to make sure they comply.⁸

Adds Shivji: “[Task force] members are also beginning to work on generating a cascading effect. We will help individual media houses to develop their own charters, customized to their needs, on the lines of DEFIR.”

⁸ Author’s interview with John Kabudi in Dar es Salaam on January 9, 2012. All further quotations from Kabudi, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.