

Policy brief

Kenya's Media Policy Landscape: 1963 - 2013

Exploring Kenya's Media Policy Landscape: 1963 – 2013 is a series of working papers published by the Media Policy Research Centre. In these papers authors reflect on the historical antecedents of Kenya's media policy debate. The series reveals a number of important and consequential historical moments in the evolution of Kenya's media policy that can be used to inform policy. The following are offered as the key policy messages emerging from this research.

Key Policy Messages

Overview

- ✓ A study of trends through the 50 years of Kenya's independence reveals that the basic motive of Kenya's media policy has, to a large extent, been to support the interests of those managing the state, as opposed to fundamental issues with broader relevance to the public.
- ✓ Old normative theories about the development of media that were popular in the 1960s no longer apply in today's fast paced world. Policy must be informed by solid understanding of the values that underlie Kenyan society today including the concepts of diversity, difference, freedom and accountability.
- ✓ In some respects Kenya's media policy has been proactive and deliberate, particularly where it relates to adoption of technologies and associated trends such as digitalization and convergence. Softer issues of policy such as freedom of expression and of the media, and freedom of information remain narrowly defined. New frameworks informed by greater understanding of the dynamics of a changing media and social cultural environment should be incorporated in all discussions and in the crafting of functions to be performed by regulatory bodies in the country.
- ✓ A progressive media policy that will serve the economy and the development of Kenya should not be obligated to short term political dynamics nor should it be vulnerable to changes and difficult transitions in politics as has been the case so far.

Kenya media, fragile elections & conflict management

- ✓ Based on the Kriegler Report (Officially the report of the Independent Review Commission (IREC), established by the Government of Kenya to inquire into all aspects of the 2007 general elections) and the Waki Report (Officially the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Post Election Violence) findings and the theoretical arguments on the efficacy of a public sphere, public and national media organizations must give voice to all contrary and divergent views not only during electioneering period but as a standard.
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- ✓ It is necessary that the media sphere should not become a tool for the advancement of one competing group at the expense of another.

Social Media & Journalism

- ✓ Expanded investment in research by media practitioners, scholars and trainers will allow better understanding of social media's impact on the flow of information and news. Social media also offers a valuable window of insight into media consumers' perceptions and appetite for journalistic content.
- ✓ A proactive media policy will encourage and support investment in digital media-first strategies and push the adoption, use and monetization from social media and digital media in general. Authentic and sustainable models and approaches to managing and use of media in a digital era are likely to emerge from expanded experimentation.

Media Commercialism & Society

- ✓ Hypercommercialization of the media in Kenya is a peril that has seen commercial interests override public interests in how media approach content and what they choose to feature. Public interest and concern must be balanced against the economic sustainability of media so as not to pander to interests of the owners, shareholders, workers, and advertisers.
- ✓ The reality of hypercommercialization as unwritten policy is made worse by media concentration in the hands of fewer and fewer companies many of whom are powerful elite. This in effect re-introduces a level of censorship and control of information and has eroded the role of media as a key agent of free expression, democracy, accountability and good governance.

(These policy briefs were developed based on research published by Media Policy Research Centre. The online version of the publication *Exploring Kenya's Media Policy Landscape: 1963 – 2013* can be accessed at <http://www.mediapolicycentre.org/kenya-media-policy-1963-2013>.)



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