

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF STORY GRANTS  
ON MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY IN KENYA**

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**Candidate's Declaration**

I, Benard Ogoi, hereby declare that this research project is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other University.



**17<sup>th</sup> November, 2022**

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**Declaration by Supervisor/s**

This research project has been presented for examination for the award of a Master's degree in Communication Studies, with my approval as the University supervisor/s



22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2022

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**DATE**

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**Dedication**

I dedicate this research project to the support system around me, including my beloved wife and children, and my parents. All of you have been my pillar and source of strength through the undergraduate, and now this postgraduate phase of my studies. I appreciate all your endurance, prayers and words of reassurance that held me as I endeavored to balance between a busy work schedule, school and family time.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACME	African Center for Media Excellence
AMI	African Media Initiative
AJEA	Annual Journalism Excellence Awards
AMWIK	Association of Media Women in Kenya
BMIA	Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa
CA	Communications Authority
CMF	Community Media Fund
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DCT	Dynamic Capabilities Theory
DWA	Deutsche Welle Akademie
EJN	Earth Journalism Network
FF	Ford Foundation
FIJ	Fund for Investigative Journalism
FMI	Fojo Media Institute
FM	Frequency Modulation
GAA	Government Advertising Agency
GIJN	Global Investigative Journalism Network
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
JHR	Journalists for Human Rights
KCA	Kenya Correspondents Association
KCOMMNET	Kenya Community Media Network
KEG	Kenya Editors Guild
KELIN	Kenya Ethical & Legal Issues Network
KUJ	Kenya Union of Journalists
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews

MCK	Media Council of Kenya
MFEA	Media Futures East Africa
NACC	National Aids Control Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NMG	Nation Media Group
NMOs	News Media Organizations
OSF	Open Society Foundation
OSIEA	Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa
RAG	Radio Africa Group
SGL	Standard Group Limited
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TRF	Thomson Reuters Foundation
TSS	The Secular Society
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.

## **Abstract**

This research examined the effects of story grants on media sustainability in Kenya. The study understood media sustainability as a derivative of quality content, non-interference with editorial oversight roles, and financial wellness of media enterprises. In this qualitative study, secondary data was derived from reviewing grants related documents from media development organizations, and analysis of related literature, while primary data was collected through in-depth key informant interviews to draw insights on the aim of story grants and their effects on content quality, and how that relates to financial sustainability of media enterprises. An interview guide was developed to help in conducting the semi-structured interviews. Study participants were purposely selected for this study based on their experience, and knowledge in the subject area. Participants were drawn from key media stakeholder organizations, and media intermediaries who receive funds from donors to sub-grant to journalists and media outlets. Grants recipients were also interviewed for this study. The study findings indicate that storytelling grants have not only bridged the costs of content production, but also contributed significantly to improved quality of media content. This has in turn attracted more sponsors, especially for community media, thereby sustaining them financially. Further, by contributing a share of the costs of production, grants have helped free the limited finances to support other institutional overheads. They have also mitigated staff turnover in the short term, despite financial constraints facing media enterprises in Kenya.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Storytelling grants or foundation funding towards media enterprises is not a new phenomenon. Media enterprises and individual journalists globally have and continue to rely on financial and technical support from foundations (Picard, 2010) to address a myriad of challenges. Besides supporting media development in countries emerging from conflicts or those in democratic transitions, and the media in exile (Ristow, 2011), philanthropy organizations have also come through for media in times of pandemics or economic crises.

In an analysis of foundations and non-profit media funding in the United States of America, Nisbet et al., (2018) traced the origin of foundation funding to the fall of major news outlets due to revenue shortfalls that led to massive layoffs. In Liberia, the loss of advertising revenues (Franklin, 2014) resulted in salary cuts and mass layoffs, thereby threatening the survival of media institutions in the West African state. The layoffs meant that the declining advertising revenues dimmed the media's ability to retain talent and maintain its scope and operations. Nisbet et al., (2018) noted that as a result, a dozen journalists established non-profit News Media Organizations (NMOs) to fill the information gap. These start-ups depended on financial support from foundations and donors for their revenues and overall sustainability. In the case of Liberia, Internews and other media development organizations intervened by providing media grants to community radio stations to support development and dissemination of messages on Covid-19 in local dialects.

The media in Kenya has expanded gradually over time to provide news from a variety of editorial perspectives since the liberalization of the media in the early 1990s. The growth has positioned Kenya's media industry as one of the most vibrant in sub-Saharan Africa (Owilla, 2021). This is buttressed by the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which in Article 34 gives the media the much-needed legal protections against any legal and extra-legal excesses of the State. As a result, Kenya is perceived to be one of the few African countries still enjoying a robust and dynamic media environment (Nyabuga, 2016; Onguny, 2001).

However, just like the drive to address economic crises for media enterprises around the world, the ongoing financial investments in storytelling grants comes against the backdrop of a series of challenges for legacy media in Kenya. On the one hand are technological disruptions that Kamau (2021) blames for the unprecedented shake-up of many legacy media business models. The Media Council of Kenya's 2015 report titled "The Impact of Digital Technologies and Internet on Media and Journalism in Kenya," documents the impact of technology on the business model of media enterprises. It is worth noting that as a result of the technological disruption, corporate advertisers are increasingly opting for relatively cheaper digital platforms (Harwood et al., 2017; Schiffrin, 2017), thereby undermining legacy media sustainability.

On the other lies the unrelenting Covid-19 pandemic (Internews, 2021), which Okoth (2021) argues, forced media owners to announce tough austerity measures in 2020 in a bid to stay afloat. As earlier mentioned in the case of Liberia, media institutions in Kenya and their journalists were equally pushed to the edge, with the latter experiencing massive salary deductions and sometimes job losses (International Sports Press Association [ISPA], 2020; Okoth, 2020). Before these developments and the delayed payments from advertisers (Reelforge and TIFA Research, 2019),

government agencies especially threatened to strangulate the media for being editorially out of sync.

In the process, the micromanagement of media advertising revenue (Harwood et al., 2017; IFJ, 2020) through the centralized Government Advertising Agency (GAA) contributed to the declining income for most media enterprises (MCK, 2015). Thus, although Kenya's legacy media continues to rely heavily on advertising as its main revenue source, media managers can no longer sit pretty as that dependency is no longer tenable (Cook and Sirkkunen, 2013). Indeed, these challenges have compelled key stakeholders to pay close attention to media sustainability and future prospects for the media industry in Kenya.

As a remedy to the heavy reliance on the ever-declining advertising revenue, Reelforge and TIFA Research (2019) assessment of the Kenya media landscape recommends that it is time for media enterprises to embrace alternative business models. This is with a view to diversifying their revenue streams for a successful business model, which Cook and Sirkkunen (2013) contend, is measured by the resultant financial sustainability. Whether for mainstream or community media, the authors emphasized that both need a level of steady income to meet their core operational costs, which she observes, can be achieved through a combination of multiple revenue streams. Cook (2016) underscored the need for alternative approaches, particularly partnerships, with a view to promoting economic resilience for media under threat.

Already, a majority of media enterprises are embracing multiple revenue streams that include foundation funding (Franklin, 2014) to ramp up their incomes. Others include e-paper subscriptions and content-driven revenues (Cook and Sirkkunen, 2013; Okoth, 2020) through paywalls (Okoth, 2021) as is already taking shape at Nation Media Group (NMG), Radio Africa Group

(RAG) and the Standard Group Limited (SG) respectively. Others have embraced sponsorships for news and talk shows while some are engaging audiences in in-house gambling promotions as evidenced in most electronic media platforms lately. The latter, gambling, has so far attracted the wrath of media industry stakeholders, led by MCK as the media regulator, occasioning efforts to define parameters for gambling promotions in radio platforms.

The other challenge relates to the shortage of experienced journalists (Internews, 2021), and a lack of practical skills among journalists joining the media industry today (Harwood, et al., 2017). Writing about self-regulation as a tool for media accountability in Kenya, Obuya (2017) accused the media of being unable to rein in wayward media practices such as hiring untrained journalists to perform professional journalism tasks. This also continues to hamper the media's collective ability to sustain high-quality, independent reporting (Harwood et al., (2017), all of which are critical ingredients of a sustainable media enterprise.

In efforts to mitigate on some of these challenges, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), regulatory agencies and other human rights organizations, most of which are supported by foundations, have come in handy to provide both financial and technical support to the media practitioners and their News Media Organizations. Whereas majority of the storytelling grant recipients have been journalists from community media enterprises, most of which are non-profit making, an analysis of records from the Media Council of Kenya shows that individual journalists from mainstream media enterprises have also successfully received such grants (MCK, 2021).

Among arguments in support of foundation funding of news media enterprises and individual journalists is the thematic interests of the funders. Nisbet et al (2018) agree, noting that the grant making process revolves around specific problems, with Rosenstiel et al (2016) holding that

foundations are often keen on supporting production of in-depth quality content on issues that they are trying to affect public policies on. Recent research from the DW Akademie as cited by Padania (2019) on donor funding of investigative journalism also strongly back these findings, noting that storytelling grants seek to support specialized in-depth reportage of investigative stories. The critical thematic issues often include fighting poverty, inequality, corruption and social injustices, or creating awareness around health, gender, the environment and governance and accountability issues among many others (Benson, 2017; Media Impact Funders, 2019; Padania, 2018; Scott et al., 2019). Indeed, the rising investments in grant-making for story production, and the attendant capacity building support is promising to boost resilience of Kenyan media enterprises, and skills development for individual journalists (Mwita, 2021). Thus, it would be important to assess how the mentorship aspect influences the quality of the final online, print or electronic media content.

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), an organization that monitors funding for media development, characterizes a sustainable media environment as one that incorporates safety of journalists who are well remunerated hence pay undivided attention to their duty. Most importantly also is the adherence to professionalism and integrity whereby journalists do not engage in endemic corruption practices. Scoones (2007) thus defines sustainability as the ability of a system to bounce back from prevalent shocks and disturbances and adopt stable states. Such disturbances could be occasioned by political interference with editorial decision-making processes, a health pandemic, and economic shocks among others.

This study agrees with CIMA on media sustainability being a product of quality content generated by a media that enjoys a stable political, legal and economic environment, and in which alternative views from all cadres of the population have an opportunity to thrive. Therefore, as to



whether the story grants are designed with a long-term plan to finance journalism that yields quality content driven by professionalism and objective editorial decision-making, and make the media self-sustaining in the realms of revenue growth in the long run is the hallmark of this study.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

With the media industry witnessing diminishing revenue sources and massive layoffs for media practitioners (Okoth, 2020; Picard, 2005), ongoing discourses on media sustainability point to uncertainty among media stakeholders on what the future portends for financial sustainability of media enterprises in Kenya. The uncertainty casts doubt on the ability of the media enterprises to internally fund better storytelling, a precursor to quality content. One gap is the lack of clear mechanisms for the storytelling grants advanced to individual journalists to complement related media content production costs.

Secondly, whereas the grant makers are keen on enhancing professionalism (MCK, 2021) through training and mentorship to help deliver quality content for media audiences, Picard (2010) points out the uncertainty of the story grants. That they (grants) tend to be short term and limited in nature hence not contributing to media financial sustainability in the long run. Myers et al., (2017) agree with Picard (2010), also offering their appraisal of the short project timeframes, and the limiting or over-bureaucratic funding mechanisms associated with storytelling grants. With these challenges, the question of what exactly motivates journalists to apply for story grants then comes in here.

Further, the thematic focus and stringent reporting requirements have the potential of pushing journalists to self-censor and report in ways that only align with the vested interests of the foundations (Scott et al., 2019), as long as their content production process is financed. And while

Cook and Sirkkunen (2013) also warns of another problem, that is the likelihood of cyclic dependency on story grants, one is tempted to interrogate not just the philosophy behind the grants, but also specifically their effectiveness in shaping the kind of content being published/broadcasted, and whether that translates to financial sustainability of the media enterprises in the long run (Franklin, 2014) or not. These aspects have not been studied in Kenya.

### **1.3 General Research Objective**

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the extent to which story grants affect of sustainability of media enterprises in Kenya.

#### **1.3.1 Specific Research Objectives**

1. To assess reasons underpinning storytelling grants in Kenya.
2. To determine the effects of storytelling grants on media quality content production in Kenya.
3. To determine the effects of storytelling grants on media financial sustainability in Kenya.

#### **1.3.2 Research Questions**

1. What is the reasoning behind storytelling grants for journalists in Kenya?
2. What effects do storytelling grants have on media quality content production in Kenya?
3. To what extent do storytelling grants affect media financial sustainability in Kenya?

#### **1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The researcher undertook an in-depth analysis of the subject under study through the eyes of the grant beneficiaries, their mentors, editors and media managers as well as the grantors. Notwithstanding the different meanings that may be ascribed to the word ‘sustainability’, this study specifically analyzed how the storytelling grants affect content quality, and the extent to which the resultant content impact on financial sustainability of media enterprises in Kenya. A major focus was placed on media enterprises and individual journalists who have benefited either directly or indirectly from the storytelling grants and the attendant mentorship. The research was mainly limited by the busy schedules of some of the intended study participants, especially with the editors and mentors to the grant recipients. However, the researcher utilized virtual platforms, specifically WhatsApp calls, to accommodate a majority of the study participants. It is notable that whereas most of the interviewees were able to share their experiences, the virtual interviews were not as effective in helping sufficiently address the issues asked.

#### **1.5 Rationale/Justification of the Study**

This study comes in the wake of heightened concerns among media stakeholders within and outside newsrooms on financial sustainability and the future of media enterprises in Kenya. Discussions around issues like minimum remuneration for journalists are fast gaining momentum, especially at the entry level given the inequalities and lack of consistency in the pay structure for journalists and media practitioners. As foundations invite newsrooms and individual journalists to apply for funding for stories about specific thematic topics, it is worth noting that available literature about the influence of such funding and the accompanying mentorship on media financial sustainability in Kenya is scanty. In fact, not much has been researched in Kenya despite the subject's growing significance. These issues require the necessity to develop frameworks for grant

makers to complement each other's efforts with a view to not only enhance sustainability of media enterprises in all facets, but also that of the storytelling grants.

The study is therefore of immense importance in adding to the body of knowledge on complementarity of assorted business models for media enterprises in Kenya as it seeks to explore and recommend possible policy interventions on storytelling grants and sustainable media funding. The study findings should also be relevant to media owners, media managers, aspiring journalists, media scholars as well as the organizations giving grants for specific thematic reporting. As a result, bodies such as Media Council of Kenya, the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), Media Owners Association (MOA), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) and the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG) could benefit from the study findings.

The findings should also be able to suggest practical ways of ensuring independence of editorial decisions while benefiting journalists from the mentorship accompanying such storytelling grants. This question is best answered by finding a balance so that both the financial and operational sustainability of media enterprises are anchored in a media industry sanctioned policy framework that benefits both. Such a policy is bound to help complement existing media business models that are being choked by dwindling revenue streams for mainstream media generally, and the lack of a clear funding policy for community media in particular.

## **1.6 Operational Definitions**

**Grants:** Financial and technical skills support given to media enterprises and individual journalists.

**Sustainability:** The ability of a media enterprise to enjoy financial wellness and editorial independence to remain afloat despite emerging turbulence in the industry.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes existing literature on media sustainability and the place of storytelling grants. It highlights the basis for storytelling grants, how training and mentorship impacts on content quality and their effects on media financial sustainability and future prospects for a media enterprise. Also highlighted are the methodologies applied by the different scholars cited in this study. Further, it identifies and discusses the theories relevant to the study and ultimately the theoretical framework within which the work falls. Finally, it concludes by outlining the gaps that this study proposes to fill to enhance media financial sustainability in Kenya.

#### 2.2 Media Sustainability

Although not entirely a new phenomenon, private foundations and media enterprises world over are increasingly entering into what Schiffrin (2016) describes as a marriage of convenience. In this marriage, there's been an increase in the uptake of storytelling grants, not just by individual journalists but also the respective media enterprises employing them (Schiffrin, 2016), both mainstream and non-profit News Media Organizations. The wide range of media enterprises benefiting from the storytelling grants indicates the rich diversity in terms of populations reached by the resultant content as well as the array of issues being highlighted. These grants accompanied by training and mentorship of grants recipients are often channeled from philanthropy organizations through media development intermediary organizations.

A qualitative study conducted by Scott et al., (2018) established that the majority of the foundations were more interested in strengthening a free press. This encompassed among other

approaches; capacity building of the media institutions and their journalists, in a bid to support journalism as a tool for social change. Social change to mean the resultant behavior both at the individual as well as at policy levels within respective media outlets.

The last few years have seen a steady increase in conversations about financial sustainability of Africa's media enterprises (Ominde, 2021). Here in Kenya, media development stakeholders coalescing around the Kenya Media Sector Working Group – KMSWG, including the Media Council of Kenya, the Kenya Editors Guild and Kenya Union of Journalists among others, are scratching their heads over the matter (Mwita, 2021). The ongoing discourses around the subject are in line with previous recommendations for media stakeholders to hold inclusive dialogues on the sustainability and future prospects of the media in Kenya (Harwood et al., 2018). As Scott et al., (2014) expound, economic or rather financial sustainability is crucial in enabling media enterprises to be free from political and economic interests and hostage. This is validated by several scholars and media development intermediary organizations who place wholesome sustainability of media enterprises at the center of their (media) success, including its impact on independence of editorial oversight and freedom (Mwita, 2021; Nyabuga, 2015; and Scott et al., 2014).

In an attempt to examine the outcomes of special support initiatives for media content creators, Doyle (2013) acknowledges the labor-intensive nature and prohibitive costs of producing media content that meets the audiences' novelty and quality expectations. Beyond being key justifications, these factors, the scholar explains, not only call for massive investments but also alternative financing models for content creators to thrive in the media business.

While considering media enterprises as business entities, Picard (2010) placed particular emphasis on rethinking and adopting sustainable media business models. He further observed that

effective media business models are a prerequisite for sustainable business operations, and ensures that revenue streams sufficiently support a financially strong media enterprise (Picard, 2005). The scholar explained that a financially strong media is able to maintain independence and hold government and other public institutions accountable while enabling the media enterprise to fund production and dissemination of quality content. As a result, multiple revenue streams including from philanthropy organizations are now contributing to the incomes of media enterprises (Franklin, 2014) albeit indirectly through support towards content production. This is driven by the need to help News Media Organizations (NMOs) find economic sustainability (Ferrucci and Nelson, 2019).

These are manifestations that storytelling grants are fast taking their critical place among contributors to content production costs, thanks to the media's dwindling incomes (Padania, 2018). A Media Impact Funders (2019) report indicates that such funding is very critical in not only supporting sustainable and strengthened media systems, but also in supporting other diverse media-related initiatives, including improving democratic processes, and raising awareness and advocacy through public service radio campaigns addressing thematic concerns, some of which already appeared earlier in the first chapter of this study. Picard (2010) affirmed this change in the way news is being financed today, the means by which news and information are disseminated to the audiences, how news is consumed and the sustainability of existing media operations. Like Benson (2017), the nexus between quality content and financial strength features strongly in Picard's propositions here, indicating that a media enterprise that is able to support production of quality content ends up attracting and retaining audiences and advertising revenues, ultimately becoming financially sustainable.

Picard (2005) emphasized thus, “Financial strength and stability is also a two-edged sword. Because financial stability can lead to improved content and strengthen the independence of the media,” (p. 341). Benson seems to endorse the seemingly thin line between financial sustainability of media enterprises, and the quality and depth of content they produce. However, Myers et al., (2017) are skeptical, observing that media assistance projects are vulnerable to sustainability problems. The scholar cites Kumar (2006), whose reflection on foundation funding for financially unsustainable media outlets in the former Soviet bloc ‘were not only a waste of donor resources but in fact worsened the sustainability of non-subsidized outlets.’ This paints a gloomy picture on the effect of such media support to the financial sustainability of media enterprises.

Regarding Schiffrin’s two sides of the same coin correlation discussed earlier, philanthropists, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) acting as media intermediaries, and media enterprises often come together to raise the visibility of various critical issues of importance to the society at large (Waisbord, 2011). However, one side bears the interests of the foundations anchored on their thematic areas of work, while on the other lies the desire for financial stability for media enterprises and individual journalists in the face of dwindling revenues for the media enterprises as already explained in chapter one of this study. While this helps to fund thematic reportage and investigative stories in the critical thematic areas already identified, some of which are under-reported because of a lack of capacity and a skills gap (Internews, 2021), the approach has the potential to compromise media editorial independence (Ominde, 2021).

Although seeking to establish the processes of grant giving, the perceptions that grantors and grantees have of their relationship, and the effect it has on independence of editorial oversight, one of the gaps that Schiffrin identified is the malleability of media outlets. The scholar held that News Media Organizations tend to adjust their own programming to suit donor demands hence be



assured of funding, often with insufficient procedures or editorial policies to safeguard their editorial independence from donor influence. Meaning that media enterprises and their journalists are often at the mercy of the grantors and are highly likely to focus on meeting the demands of the former in order to access the grants so as to stay afloat even when they really don't agree with the terms and conditions that come along with the grants. It thus means the problem is not necessarily with the grantors, but a willingness by the media enterprises or their journalists to conform to the dictates of the former, even if the media does not agree with the preconditions.

On this, Rosenstiel et al., (2016) posit that the ethics of taking grants from foundations and gifts from philanthropy organizations to produce news is still evolving and not without controversy. They documented a rare incident where a New York based public TV station returned a large journalism grant for a documentary series because of the donor's connection to the topic being covered. What this possibly means is that editorial independence is critical and of utmost importance to some journalists and media enterprises, as long as they are able to draw the line between professionalism and funding needs. For instance, in principle, donors often expect their funding to produce outputs agreed on way before signing the grant agreements, which should always be followed by a report indicating areas of success, lessons learnt and gaps that need improvement.

As a result, one of the requirements for successful grantees is to go beyond compiling an in-depth story to also measuring and reporting back on the impact, thereby placing media enterprises in a tight spot (Benson, 2017). This is because foundations, or philanthropy organizations in the case of this study, are keen on understanding whether journalistic support is making a difference in society (Scott et al., 2018). This involves the journalists receiving storytelling grants documenting and demonstrating changes in attitudes, awareness, knowledge levels and review of

laws as a result of their stories (Nisbet et al), as well as of policy changes and audience reach (Benson, 2017). Scott et al., (2017, 2019) called it ‘solutions journalism.’

While weighing in on the emerging trend among donors funding media development, Schiffrin (2017) posits that donors are now much more into metrics and particularly tracking outcomes of what they fund, and therefore expect to see measurable impact in terms of reach and change of behavior or actions taken as a result. These mean that journalists and media enterprises have to justify why they need to continue receiving the story grants, hence part of the indirect influence that grantors try to exert on their grantees. It also means that journalists receiving story grants have a duty to reflect a worldview that aligns with their donor’s interests (Scott et al., 2017).

Beyond impacting how journalists and their news media enterprises work (Scott et al., 2018), this not only raises issues of journalistic independence and conflict of interest on the part of the grantors, but has also been described as distracting journalists and their media enterprises from their core mandate (Padania, 2019), which are to inform and educate their audiences. Whereas the extra tasks may, in the end, prove the quality of the final media content, it has a potential to pre-occupy the grantees with the task of documenting reach and audience feedback hence affect their ethical considerations, and ultimately revenue flow hence financial sustainability prospects. It is on this basis that Myers et al., (2017) sums these as burdensome reporting requirements.

They further observed that the grant makers’ incentives for journalists to deliver impactful feature reports on specific thematic topics is evidence that such grants come with substantial extent of influence on journalistic practices. The danger here is that should the grantors exit or change

their strategic focus then the grant beneficiaries stand to lose the funding and fall since such funding depends on the generosity of sponsoring foundations. Ferrucci and Nelson (2019) reinforced the findings, noting it as a concern that grant recipients are bound to report more success stories than they would do failures, to increase their chances of continued funding.

Although well intentioned, journalism mentorship implies a situation where journalists surrender their agency to the elite entities situated outside the boundaries of journalism (Scott et al., 2019). This, they opine, has a potential to enable powerful businesspeople, in this case philanthropists from the Global North such as the Ford Foundation, Knight Frank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Open Society Foundation (OSF) through its regional offices such as the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA), to exercise indirect forms of editorial influence by altering the framing or tone of journalistic articles.

Ferrucci and Nelson (2019) highlight instances where media development donors sometimes encourage their grant beneficiaries to cover or overlook certain stories, or to report on them in particular ways. One such way is what Schiffrin (2017) calls pressure of commission, where donors only supported coverage of specific subjects and in particular ways. What these requirements symbolize is that the ultimate goal of the grantor is not necessarily the story they fund but what its outcome is.

Such collaborative efforts between grant-makers, media enterprises and individual journalists risk causing skewed power dynamics (Ferrucci and Nelson, 2019), even as Ominde (2021) acknowledges the persistent fears that such grants are a threat to media independence. The scholars further note that foundations and their intermediaries, or story production grant makers as is the

case for this study, do influence not just the individual journalists receiving story grants, but most importantly also the newsrooms they work for.

Importantly therefore, Scott et al., (2017) highlight the importance of considering the prevailing media context as well as journalistic agency in managing the journalist-donor relationship. While relatively few written guidelines exist (Rosenstiel et al., 2016), oftentimes protection of journalistic independence in the context of nonprofit news media is left to good intentions between the parties involved. And where such policies exist, Nisbet et al., (2018) question if the media enterprises and journalists receiving grants ever ask funders to recognize them. Schiffrin (2016) further found that although donor involvement at times focus on guiding journalists and their media enterprises on what topics should be covered, in some cases such engrossment extends to altering story ideas and suggestions for which sources should be included in media reports. The scholar concludes that it is important how grantors and journalists negotiate and implement grant related agreements.

Beyond other factors, Rosenstiel et al., (2016) established that the money involved also played a critical role in the grantees' decision-making process. As a result, the scholars argue that some media enterprises accept the specific project funding, ostensibly because they considered it important for their financial sustainability and nothing more. Using the hierarchy of influence model, Ferrucci and Nelson (2019) reinforces both Benson and Padania's reservations as they try to understand how foundations exercise influence over the news outlets they fund. They argue that unlike with advertising, foundation funding is often hinged on swaying editorial decisions thus clouding the boundary between news production and revenue generation. As a result, the scholars in their conclusions recommend further research on the effects that outside institutions may have on journalism.

Certainly therefore, the grantors involvement in shaping emerging stories through mentorship in the story production processes point to a desire to determine editorial decisions of the grantees. As Susman-Peña (2012) sums it, “donors too often model the same behavior of using the media as a tool for their own purposes” (p. 27), calling it an unfortunate practice. It is on this premise that Harwood et al., (2017) argue that donor-supported trainings, capacity building initiatives including mentorships are not designed to address the critical needs of journalists per se. The report attempts to remedy the lack of practical skills by suggesting a journalist centered mentorship approach.

Schiffrin’s ‘marriage of convenience’ analogy alluded to earlier thus explains the relationship between the private foundations that support media development initiatives, as well as the intermediary organizations. It also helps in understanding the linkages with the target media enterprises and their journalists who are the grants recipients. With these interests, Benson (2017) draws negative conclusions about storytelling grants. The scholar argues that media enterprises and individual journalists’ dependent on foundation funding are at a greater risk of being puppets of the grantors in pushing their agenda. Padania (2019) supports this argument, noting that grantees are left exposed to the ever-changing priorities of the donors, and pushed to orient news products primarily for small, elite audiences in order to fit into the requirements.

In a multi-method qualitative study that involved analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews to establish possible ethical issues around foundation funding; Scott et al., (2017) opined that donor power operated indirectly and was many times contradicting the fundamental professional values within the non-profit News Media Organizations. Thus, although media development donors may not necessarily seek to influence content; Schiffrin (2017) and Scott et al.,

2019) agree with Benson's assertions on the dangers associated with unchecked foundation funding, observing that in the process foundations and their intermediaries end up making decisions for the rest and eventually affecting everyone in the society.

It is important to note however, as Rosenstiel et al., (2016) found, that there is little evidence to suggest that grantors access and review content before publishing/broadcast. The author thus disagrees with the notion that mentorship is meant to influence editorial decision-making by journalists and media enterprises. Notably, existing literature does not pay attention to the role of mentorship in shaping story ideas and determining the quality of the final content, which this study seeks to unravel.

Whereas the scholars hold that the thematic approach makes it difficult for grantors to fund general operating expenses of prospective institutional grantees, Scott et al., (2019) in the UK acknowledged that foundation funding is a key solution to the economic crises arising from failed media business models. In terms of media financial sustainability strategies, they argued that media enterprises utilized storytelling grants to achieve more with less. This can be understood to mean that with multiple grants on the same theme, various stories with diverse angles could be published and/or broadcast while riding on the same resources and accounting to all the grantors at the same time. For example, some media enterprises could commission freelancers to produce several stories about the agreed upon thematic topics and in the process make savings by cutting down on production costs and still achieve the desired impact. There also the case with multi-thematic grants, in which journalists are allowed to submit more than one application at the same time.

Rosenstiel et al., (2016) posit that the thematic focus sometimes narrows down to more specific issues from the broader subject areas, such as specifying media coverage of particular aspects within a theme. For instance, from a general reportage on health to focusing on a particular health aspect affecting a community such as reproductive health rights, or breast cancer. These findings signify that sustainability of media enterprises goes far beyond just the money. Other than the support for production and dissemination of stories in the different thematic areas, funders tend to provide project related or restricted funds to achieve specific predefined outcomes (Padania, 2018). These could be their interest in promoting accountability and governance around the select thematic issues. For instance, media development networks such as Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) are specifically keen on holding service providers and duty bearers to account and to be defenders of human rights, or to influence a change of policy.

This approach, according to Padania (2018) and Schiffrin (2019), is increasingly shifting foundation funding from general media development to a focus on media for development hence treating the media only as a means to an end. It thus indicates a change from general media institutional support to a more strategic engagement with the media as a tool for societal advancement. This, according to Scott et al., (2018), is based on the argument that much of the world's population is deprived of essential information necessary to sustain life and therefore the need to enhance the media's, and specifically journalists' capacity to tell stories that are solution oriented.

However, there are emerging concerns with this positioning of the media as a tool for development rather than in developing it wholly to effectively play its role. One is that media enterprises have increasingly ended up with weak institutional structures and management practices (FID, 2021). This, as the thematic funding responds to supporting content on topics that funders

care about while paying lip service to institutional capacity strengthening (Padania, 2018). Nonetheless, there is hope in the philosophy behind the technical support involving mentorship and its ability to strengthen the human resource capacity as an institutional asset for news media organizations. In its recommendations on sustainability and organizational health, the American Press Institute (2017) noted the need for funders to go beyond supporting reportage of thematic content, but also backing efforts to strengthen institutional structures of News Media Organizations. This, according to Myers et al., (2017), is critical in building the capacity of the media over time.

Conversely, these do not in any way erase the good intentions of the story grants. Schiffrin argues specifically that the focus of foundations supporting production of stories in specific thematic areas sets an agenda on the problems the public should know about and even pressures local governments to fix such problems. This agenda setting has the potential to shape how grantees frame the issues they report on hence influencing not only the content that their audiences consume, but also a push for accountability by duty bearers charged with addressing particular issues. Indeed, in their findings, Scott et al., (2019) established that news outlets that received foundation funding produced in-depth and impactful content that not only enhanced the media agenda, but also drew attention of their audiences to critical issues that media often ignored or under-reported on. This assertion is in tandem with the position Benson (2017) holds on the issue.

Thus, to achieve media financial sustainability especially for non-profits, Benson recommends foundation funding reforms to support more long-term, no-strings-attached storytelling and institutional strengthening grants to help nonprofit news media outlets overcome their funding limitations. Also, Nisbet et al., (2018) hold that philanthropy organizations need to set aside a modest amount annually for a journalism fund that could support news production and dissemination in needy communities.



### 2.3 Sustainability in the Kenyan Context

As already indicated, the persistent uncertainty on media financial sustainability is linked to a raft of developments, including a drop in newspaper circulation, fluidity of audiences, declining profits attributed to dwindling revenues (David et al., 2010), and retrenchments of key media personnel (Mwita, 2021). Other factors include social media platforms that continue to offer relatively flexible avenues for alternative journalism as well as cheaper advertising rates. These factors combined have hit the media hard, including on quality of content churned out by media enterprises. Researchers in Kenya would agree with Picard, reiterating that the ‘increased competition and declining advertising spends on traditional media calls for Kenyan media enterprises to diversify their income streams (Harwood et al., 2018; TIFA Research, 2019).

In mid-2020 as the coronavirus pandemic continued to disrupt media business prospects in Kenya, and indeed globally, donors came through for most journalists as well as community media enterprises (Mwita, 2021). Partly, the intervention was justified by the argument that journalists earn so little from their jobs such that they are forced to accept money from other sources (Padania, 2019). As a result, many media enterprises, especially the non-profit news media organizations and individual journalists have been able to survive on storytelling grants and institutional strengthening grants (Schiffrin, 2021) respectively, though he vouches for a more systematic support structure.

For instance, there has been an increasing number of ‘veteran’ journalists in Kenya, largely those who have left traditional media enterprises setting up their own smaller News Media Organizations independent of the mainstream media. The likes of Africa Uncensored associated with multiple award-winning investigative journalist John-Allan Namu, and Debunk Media established by Asha Mwilu, formerly of Citizen Television are just but a few examples. Both outfits, among

many others dotting the African continent, Ominde (2021) reports, receive grants from foundations to document special interest stories on issues affecting the society.

These include a focus on investigative reporting around sensitive topics such as maternal health, democracy, human rights (Susman-Peña (2012), gender, sexual minorities, social justice (Padania, 2018), transparency and human trafficking among others. These are sometimes influenced by their governments' foreign policy towards the recipient country (Susman-Peña, 2012). This argument is in tandem with Awiti et al., (2020) predictions on the rise of smaller news media producers and alternative media focusing on investigative journalism on specialized topics.

Unfortunately, grants funding tends to be limited and offered only for a short period of time (Picard, 2010), mostly ending when the funder is satisfied that the initially set objectives have been met, or sometimes when they shift to other areas of interest to their work. A Media Impact Funders (2019) report puts it bluntly that long term-funding is rare especially for media enterprises in the Global South, noting that the few that exist are majorly concentrated in South Africa and Kenya. Adding their voice on the size of funding; Scott et al., (2018) note that grants tend to range in size and duration, from ad hoc and fragmented support (Myers, 2009) for individual journalists to make a single trip, to the very rare institutional support for media enterprises.

Owing to their often short term nature and fast changing donors' interests, the Internews (2021) report accounts that it becomes difficult to tell the effectiveness of such grants on media sustainability. As Susman-Peña (2012) adds, the short timeframes, and over-bureaucratic granting processes have paid little attention to the business side of the media not just in the global scene but also in Kenya. The net effect of this is the inability of media enterprises to plan in advance for tough economic times, outside their dwindling revenue sources. In the end, Picard (2005) opines

that many media enterprises relying upon uncertain funds provided by philanthropy organizations end up struggling financially and therefore vulnerable to the machinations of economic and political operatives when such funding comes to a halt.

Padania (2019) thus proposes that grantors be able to provide core funding to media enterprises and investigative journalists, urging funders to resist the urge to support individual or one-off pieces of content or specific investigations. In efforts to strengthen the media in Kenya, Harwood et al., (2017) emphasize on the need for donors to institute a jointly agreeable system to fund journalists pursuing important investigative stories. The researchers further recognize the need to pay special attention to women journalists as well as those working in faraway parts of the country when awarding story grants.

It is however, perplexing that media enterprises in Kenya have not taken advantage of the story grants to develop a hybrid business model that can diversify their revenue streams and ensure local media have adequate resources to effectively cover critical issues across the country (Harwood et al., 2017). Thus, it would be interesting to specifically understand the influence of storytelling grants not just on their editorial decisions and content quality, but also whether such grants can be tailored to complement existing revenue streams for media enterprises with a view to enhancing their financial sustainability and future prospects.

Notably, among key discourses within the Kenya media landscape, Internews (2021) report recommends the establishment of a media diversity fund to complement existing revenue streams, besides the need to engage policy makers on the establishment of a journalism fund. Both the proposed journalism fund and media diversity fund can go a long way in strengthening financial

sustainability of media enterprises collectively, which in the end has the potential to impact positively on production of quality content as well as enhancing independence of editorial oversight. Involvement of international media development partners such as in grant making and foundation funding for media can give a boost through seed funding to such efforts and help in supporting development of policies for sustainability of media enterprises. Even more important is the recommendation that foundation funding be advanced for both the non-profit as well as the mainstream media (FID, 2021), while also making provisions for long-term funding, especially for developing stories.

With most of the existing literature representing the context in the global North, the researcher did not come across any scholarly study in Kenya thus an opportunity to critically analyze the effects of story grants on media sustainability within the Kenyan media context, and whether that effect is good or bad for journalism. Further, existing literature is not clear on the linkage between story grants and existing revenue streams for media enterprises, leaving room for this study to try to establish where a hybrid model can fit, especially with regards to sharing of production costs.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

While discussing theoretical frameworks relevant to the management of media enterprises in the contexts of media divergence and convergence, Mahoney and Tang (2021) rely on the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) to explain some of the transformations that continue to reshape media business models hence their financial sustainability approaches.

Proposed by Teece, and Pisano (1994), the theory which is anchored on strategic change (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2009) posits that the emergent business contexts push firms to innovate

and develop adaptable internal and external competencies in order to thrive. Teece et al., (1997) defined DCT as “the firm’s ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address the rapidly changing environments,” (p. 516). Dynamic, or change, as Winter (2003) refers to it, is constant. The ability to adapt and remain competitive therefore lies in how best firms adjust their resources (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) and management strategies to build a strong competitive advantage in the fast changing business environment (Oliver, 2018).

Indeed, enterprises must be willing to make appropriate internal changes or adjustments for their own sustainability (Samsudin and Ismail, 2019), and this applies to media enterprises too. For effective deployment of the dynamic capability theory, the adjustments are dependent on constantly scanning and shaping existing market opportunities, seizing new market opportunities as well as creating, extending and modifying the existing resource base (Teece et al.,1997). While Auger and Teece, (2009, as cited in Kitenga and Thuo, 2014) agree, they emphasize on the protection of existing knowledge assets, competencies, and complementary assets with the aim of achieving a sustained competitive advantage.

Picard (2005) identifies some of the facilitative capabilities as a competitive marketplace, convergent business models, and most importantly, financial strength. Leonard-Barton (1992), while explaining a core capability of the firm, focussed on knowledge, which he defined as “the knowledge set that distinguishes and provides a competitive advantage,” (p. 113). He identifies two among four key dimensions of the knowledge set relevant to financial sustainability of media enterprises as employee knowledge and skills, and managerial systems. Achieving wholesome sustainability requires media enterprises to continuously engage in learning (Oliver, 2018), and to create knowledge pathways for their journalists through programs or networks with strategic partners (Leonard-Barton, 1992).

The processes leading to the desired change must therefore be enacted systematically through strategic decision-making, prudent utilization of resources and forming alliances (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) with other stakeholders so as to give an enterprise the competitive advantage over its peers (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2009). The systematic approach is important, otherwise as Kitenga and Thuo (2014) caution, a dynamic capability that does not result in the creation of resources for the enhancement of a firm's sustainable competitive advantage would not be treasured.

Important to note is that the functionality of dynamic capabilities can be duplicated across firms (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). In view of financial sustainability of media enterprises, Mahoney and Tang (2021) recommend the need to invest in employee expertise and lifelong learning in a variety of specializations. Continuous learning is instrumental in the creation and development of dynamic capabilities (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2009). The scholars emphasize the need for strategic collaborations with external experts to contribute to the success of media enterprises. Such collaborations could include following keenly on the potential partnerships in content production.

These range from training on specialized or rather thematic reporting as already widely discussed in this chapter, allowing their journalists to apply for storytelling grants as well as benefit from the mentorship sessions to tell their stories. These are key drivers of the storytelling grants that can contribute to quality content production and ultimately translate to more audiences and growth of revenue. Training and mentorship sessions that accompany storytelling grants, for example, can be among the external knowledge to be adopted, considering the initial massive financial and human resource investments that media enterprises may have to incur to support the professionalism and quality content production.

Arguments by the different scholars (Oliver, 2018; Samsudin and Ismail, 2019; Teece et al., 1997) on the application of dynamic capabilities theory all seem to suggest that the management of respective media enterprises have a responsibility to identify and exploit opportunities by adjusting their operations appropriately in order to remain afloat. This may require an internal assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as a rigorous scan of existing operational threats and opportunities that can help turn around its fortunes.

## **Conclusion**

As the arguments above show, story grants are well intentioned to support the media in playing its role effectively as a public watchdog. It is emerging that journalists are expected to go far beyond just producing the funded content, to also document the potential impact of their stories in a bid to establish the outcomes of stories published through the story grants. This places journalists and by extension the media enterprises they work for in a tight spot. Further, it has emerged that the interests of the philanthropy foundations have a likely impact on the editorial decisions as well as the content that finally reaches media audiences is tailored to meet the mentorship requirements of the funders. The next chapter delves into the research methodologies that will be employed in the collection and analysis of data as well as the presentation of findings. a financially sustainable media enterprise that is able to support production of quality content ends up attracting and retaining audiences and ultimately advertising revenues.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research techniques that were employed in the collection and analysis of data for this study. It looks at research design, research approaches, target population for the study, sample size and the sampling procedure, data collection procedures and methods as well as ethical considerations. Also discussed in this chapter is the reliability and validity of the study findings.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study was purely qualitative. The study utilized a detailed analysis of story grants documents from the media intermediary organizations, followed by in-depth informant interviews to critically analyze the extent to which storytelling grants contributed to media sustainability in Kenya. This design enabled the researcher to obtain firsthand experiences from different perspectives and therefore enable a deeper understanding of the subject under study (Bogdan et al., 2016). Ruhl (2004) adds that multi-methods such as in-depth interviews and observations not only help explain how behaviors arise, but also to reconstruct perspectives on their occurrence. The resultant critical discourses provide very rich data, which is necessary for a deeper understanding of an issue under consideration.



### **3.3 Research Approach**

The researcher began with a detailed analysis and review of documents announcing storytelling grants, with a view to establishing the underlying requirements, dominant thematic areas they focus on as well as their terms and conditions among other issues the grant makers may have been keen on. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with the key informants. The first set of such interviews targeted the beneficiaries of storytelling grants to collect qualitative data in form of opinions and lived experiences with the grants and accompanying mentorship sessions, and how these might have impacted on content quality, professional journalism, their journalistic work and career growth among others.

The second set of the informant interviews focussed on understanding the philosophy behind storytelling grants as well as their effects on content quality and framing, from the media intermediaries perspectives and mentors of the grants beneficiaries. Lastly, select managers and editors from respective media outlets were interviewed to understand how the storytelling grants might have affected or impacted on the financial sustainability for media enterprises in Kenya. This enabled the researcher to document lived experiences, knowledge, and in-depth reflections from seasoned journalists, story grant intermediaries as well as media experts on the subject under study. The different perspectives were written down and also recorded for later transcriptions and reference.

### **3.4 Target Population**

The study population included individual journalists who are recipients of storytelling grants, the grant givers and their intermediaries as well as mentors, media managers and editors. Some of the media stakeholders who were interviewed included a representative of the Media

Council of Kenya (MCK) as the regulator and also an intermediary in the media grant making process, a representative of the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), also an intermediary, and a representative of the Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA), another intermediary. These entities helped shed light on the philosophy behind the story grants within the Kenya context and how they contributed to media sustainability. A representative of the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG), the umbrella body for media editors, was also interviewed to help shed light on the effects of story grants on content production, content quality and editorial independence. Finally, perspectives of the media managers helped the researcher to evaluate the effects of story grants on media financial sustainability.

### **3.5 Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The researcher purposely sampled study participants from select media enterprises, philanthropy organizations and the media intermediary organizations. Purposive sampling method is a non-probability sampling technique that prioritizes identification and selection of study participants based on predetermined frames, such as their being proficient and well-versed with a phenomenon of interest (Abubakar et al., 2016). For this study, the purposive sampling helps ensure that such parameters as gender, age, geographical region and type of media enterprise are adhered to in arriving at the appropriate sample size for the study. Media type here refers to the categorization of news outlets as either mainstream, religious or community based, their language of broadcast notwithstanding.

Importantly, Abubakar et al., (2016) have supported the importance of paying keen attention to informants' experiences. In the case of this study, the researcher was keen on identifying such informants with the experience with storytelling grants as beneficiaries, knowledge in media

management and availability and willingness to provide information for the study, being articulate and well versed with the dominant discourses in the subject under study, as well as their interaction with the grantees as mentors and news editors.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedures and Research Instruments**

The researcher used qualitative multi-methods to collect data from the study sample. First, document analysis helped provide a background justifying the existence of storytelling grants and accompanying mentorship sessions as well as the thematic focus and pre-conditions for such grants. This was followed by in-depth interviews with Key Informants (KIs) that allowed the researcher to administer open ended questions orally and also record audio responses for later transcriptions and reference. Because of the individualistic focus of the storytelling grants, the in-depth interviews with grantees helped in documenting and analyzing individualized experiences and detailed accounts with the grants and attendant mentorship processes with regards to their influence on content quality and professional journalism. Further, in-depth interviews were critical in enabling a deeper understanding of the key motivations towards storytelling grants both by journalists and the grant makers, as well as their outcomes in influencing content quality (Lewis et al., 2003).

In-depth or semi-structured interviews are effective with elite members of the society, of which journalists are, as well as when targeting high-level bureaucrats such as editors and media managers who are a key population for this study. These groups are accustomed to efficient use of their time (Bernard, 2006), and therefore it shows that as a researcher, one must be adequately prepared and clearly understand what s/he seeks to collect from the interviews. Notably, the interview guide allows room for both the researcher and the interviewee to follow new leads. Whereas such interviews are done face-to-face in most cases, it is important to note that the geographical

distribution of the grantees as well as the busy schedules of the editors, mentors and media managers limited the in-person interactions with the researcher, forcing him to conduct some of the interviews via the phone. This made sure that the participation in the study was reflective of the national distribution of journalists receiving the grants.

As a participant researcher, the researcher also took field notes so as to be able to later describe and comprehend issues under study in a descriptive manner. Participant observation as a research method, according to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), is not only key in enhancing the quality of data obtained during fieldwork, but also in enhancing the quality of analysis and interpretation of all data, even those collected through the other methods. To help understand what fieldwork roles entail, Bernard (2006) describes the three main fieldwork roles of a participant researcher which include: (1) complete participant, (2) participant observer, and (3) complete observer.

This study thus embraced the second role; that of a participant observer, as the researcher is also often involved in supporting journalists through mentorship to produce their stories. Lewis et al., (2003) explains this characteristic of qualitative research as the reflexive approach, where the researcher is also able to report his/her personal field experiences. The researcher agrees with Golafshani (2003) on the importance of qualitative researcher's entanglement into the research, which is to be able to accurately record events as they unfold. Thus, the researcher herein being actively involved in the evaluation and disbursement of grants applications was able to record some of the arguments and perceptions towards the research topic as observed both from select grant beneficiaries as well as mentors assigned to them.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

All data collected for this study was analyzed qualitatively. The different perspectives collected through analysis of related documents, participant observations and in-depth interviews were transcribed into written texts and arranged coherently into thematic areas around the research objectives. The findings were then presented in narratives while summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting information that seemed to be outstanding from the texts collected. Due to the flexible nature of qualitative studies, the emerging patterns, concepts and insights informed the researcher's derived meanings and understandings of the data collected (Bogdan et al., 2016). The analysis was then presented thematically as per the three objectives addressing the key questions for this research.

### **3.8 Reliability and Validity**

To ensure reliability of the research findings, the researcher authenticated the qualitative data findings by organizing them thematically to establish patterns and trends that were in agreement, then synthesized and consolidated similar responses from the varied study participants. The qualitative data from official documents reviewed, researcher observations as well as in-depth interviews were compared to identify cross-cutting arguments.

As for validity of the research findings, the qualitative multi-methods approach such as document analysis and key informant interviews not only helped in collecting data from multifaceted sources, but also in triangulating the data to allow a deeper understanding of the subject from different worldviews (Creswell, 2018; Sensing, 2011). The researcher documented all the

informant interviews and observed happenings by taking detailed field notes throughout the fieldwork. The use of participant observation, Bernard (2006) argues, extends both the internal and the external validity of what the researcher learns from interviewing and watching people.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Before embarking on data collection, the researcher sought clearance and an introduction letter from the University of Nairobi to explain the purpose of the study to the target participants. Further, the researcher sought consent from the study participants for their voluntary participation in the study. Particularly, participants were given adequate information on the purpose and objectives of the study, procedures for data documentation as well as how the findings would be used.

### **Conclusion**

Borrowing from Bogdan et al., (2016), it is emerging strongly that the qualitative multi-methods design is the most appropriate approach in enabling the researcher to obtain firsthand information from diverse perspectives of the study participants. The study therefore favored a qualitative approach that began with a detailed analysis and review of related documents, followed by semi-structured interviews with purposely identified study participants from select philanthropy organizations, media intermediary organizations, grants beneficiaries, respective media managers, editors and mentors. Documenting the lived experiences (Alkassim et al., 2016), in-depth reflections and different worldviews (Creswell, 2018) was thus preferred to not only help in facilitating a deeper understanding of the study objectives, but also in triangulating the data to allow critical discourses on the subject. The resultant qualitative data was then arranged coherently into thematic areas around the research objectives, ensuring that emerging patterns and trends are in sync.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This academic study drew upon research from around the world, especially from the Global North, on storytelling grants and media development. Detailed insights from the literature review helped in identifying the gaps, and defining the research questions for this study. This chapter therefore presents the findings of an analysis of documents announcing storytelling grants from philanthropy organizations and their intermediaries. This is then followed by the analysis, interpretation and presentation of qualitative data gathered both from key informants that included grants beneficiaries, media managers, editors and journalism mentors. The researcher endeavors to link the research questions and the theoretical framework in presenting and discussing the study findings. In an effort to satisfy the research objectives. The qualitative findings are organized according to the themes that emerged from the document reviews and informant interviews. Overall, informant interviews with the 3 mentors, 2 grants intermediaries, 3 station managers, 1 editor and 18 grants recipients show that story grants have helped in improving content quality through journalistic skills improvement and filled the content production funding gap, although there are concerns regarding the level of honesty of grants recipients, and the influence on editorial oversight roles.

#### 4.2 Towards Media Sustainability

Public discourse on media sustainability is increasingly dominant among media stakeholders in Kenya and beyond. For purposes of this study, media sustainability as earlier explained is

the ability of a media enterprise to enjoy financial wellness driven by quality journalism and professionalism. World over, the changing media landscape is pushing media enterprises to try to adopt alternative revenue avenues (Owilla et al., 2022) that can complement existing business models. One such approach involves partnering with philanthropy organizations and their intermediaries and government agencies on content production aided by storytelling grants.

A growing list of donors are currently offering storytelling grants to individual journalists globally, a practice that is fast gaining traction in Kenya too. For instance, the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) Africa lists some of the foundations and their intermediaries in its website. The list contains entities that primarily provide training, story grants and mentorship to support investigative journalism that mainstream media enterprises no longer invest much resources in, due to their perceived ‘expensive, time-consuming and specialist’ nature (Scott et al., 2017).

The high cost implication here, means that news media enterprises are incapacitated and therefore unable to fund content production, or generally under report on such important issues as health, climate change or food insecurity, argues Scott et al., (2018). Content production support is therefore more critical at a time when the triple problems of Covid-19, advancements in technology and political manipulation have interrupted the traditional media revenue streams (Internews, 2021).

Among philanthropist organizations, the Ford Foundation (FF) supports investigative journalism that seeks to enhance accountability by duty bearers, and amplify voices of the marginalized groups. Other than direct grants to individual journalists, media development organizations such as the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) and the International Media Support



(IMS) have often provided institutional strengthening grants to media enterprises. These are just a few around the globe. Some of the foundations' intermediaries are either based in or largely target the Global South. They include the African Center for Media Excellence (ACME) based in Kampala - Uganda, which seeks to strengthen the media to effectively provide information on public affairs and play a role in monitoring official power. Entities like the African Media Initiative (AMI) not only provide storytelling grants but also collaborate in content co-creation besides offering training opportunities for journalists.

Beyond working to strengthen professional journalism, Fojo Media Institute (FMI) also supports News Media Organizations (NMOs) and individual journalists in Kenya, among five African countries, to be financially independent, while both the DW Akademie and Internews run media development programs on media viability in Kenya. Being the oldest of the storytelling grants, the Fund for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) supports individual journalists that include freelance reporters, authors and small publications to research and report stories that break new ground and expose wrongdoing in society.

The Reporting Award that is offered annually by Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute of New York University supports journalism on under-reported topics in public interest as long as the particular stories are already developing. This is also the case for Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) whose storytelling grants also cover data costs for participants' stories on topics that are under-covered by the mainstream media, while the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and The Secular Society (TSS) supports journalism produced by and about women through gender-sensitive coverage of underreported topics.

### **4.3 The growing traction of storytelling grants in Kenya's media landscape**

#### **4.3.1 Key drivers of storytelling grants**

One outstanding argument in support of foundation funding of news media enterprises and individual journalists is the thematic interests of the funders. Rosenstiel et al., (2016) argue that foundations are often keen on supporting production of quality content on issues that they are trying to affect public policies on. Nisbet et al., (2018) agree, noting that the grant making process revolves around specific problems, many a times defined by the funders themselves.

Recent research from the DW Akademie (Padania, 2019) on donor funding of investigative journalism strongly backs this finding, noting that storytelling grants seek to support specialized in-depth reportage of investigative stories. The critical thematic issues often include fighting poverty, inequality, corruption and social injustices, or creating awareness around specific health, gender, climate change and governance issues among many others (Benson, 2017; Media Impact Funders, 2019; Padania, 2018; and Scott et al., 2019).

The scholars' argument that the storytelling grant makers create requirements and incentives for journalists to deliver impactful feature reports is evidence that such grants come with substantial extent of influence on journalistic practices. They highlight instances where media development donors sometimes encourage their grant beneficiaries to cover or overlook certain stories, or to report on them in particular ways. One such way is what Schiffrin (2017) calls pressure of commission, where donors only support coverage of specific subjects and in particular ways.

Schiffrin (2016) posits that although donor involvement at times focus on guiding journalists and their media enterprises on what topics should be covered, in some cases such involvement extended to story ideas and suggestions for which sources should be included in the reporting.

Certainly therefore, the grantors involvement in shaping emerging stories through mentorship in the story production processes point to a desire to determine the framing of stories by grant recipients.

#### **4.3.2 Key players providing storytelling grants in Kenya**

The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), Kenya Correspondents Association (KCA) and the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) are among the many media intermediary organizations that advance story grants to journalists. From time to time, they receive foundation funding from philanthropy organizations; and create a platform to disburse the same to individual journalists and select media enterprises in form of storytelling grants and institutional support funds. The Media Council of Kenya as an intermediary of OSIEA has been supporting select community media enterprises through institutional and individual storytelling grants (MCK, 2021). Also, Journalists for Human Rights (JHR), Info-Nile, Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) are among trans-national organizations that have invested in various categories of investigative journalism in Kenya.

While appreciating the role that journalists and media plays in informing and communicating to communities through their channels, Africa Uncensored and Youth for SDGs Kenya launched a call for storytelling grants to tell climate change stories. With financial support from Hivos East Africa, the grants aimed to document challenges that citizens are facing due to climate change, actions that communities are taking to deal with the impacts of climate change and changes that need to happen in Kenya's governance processes to strengthen climate change interventions. The call emphasized on the importance of stories focusing on women, youth, the marginalized and minority communities.

The insistence on the key issues to address in the stories point to the recurring focus on multidimensional perspectives of story ideas within specific themes. For instance, an analysis of the MCK shortlist of grantees shows that as at July 2021, it advanced 162 story grants for climate change stories, 150 on gender sensitive reporting, and 59 others on legislative and constitutional development reporting (MCK, 2021).

Partnering with the National Aids Control Council (NACC), the MCK also launched a storytelling grants call focused on in depth reporting of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The call was keen on delving deep into the specific HIV/AIDS intersectionalities that included: i) what it would take to end HIV/AIDS among children; ii) how to end stigma associated with HIV/AIDS; iii) why condom programming is a game changer in ending new HIV infections; iv) and ending the triple threat of HIV infections, pregnancies and sexual and gender-based violence among adolescents as a threat to national development. This narrowing down to more specific issues from the broader HIV/AIDS theme agrees with Rosenstiel et al., (2016).

In May 2021, the Kenya Ethical & Legal Issues Network on HIV and AIDS (KELIN), led a consortium of organizations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SHRH) to launch a call for storytelling grants. The call was categorical on the criteria for shortlisting successful grants applicants, key among them being the prioritization of stories that highlight SHRH issues affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups of women living with HIV, women living with disabilities, sex workers, LGBT persons, adolescents and women injecting drugs; and the crosscutting issues such as poverty, unsafe abortion, religion, teen pregnancies and culture. KELIN is a human rights Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working to protect and promote health-related human rights in Kenya.

Another grants call by the MCK on reporting access to education (MCK, 2022) emphasized on story ideas that present in depth coverage to ignite discourse on and public participation in developing appropriate policies that promote access to education. Specifically, the call was keen on highlighting education as a right that should be made available to all Kenyans. This is in line with Article 43 (1 f) of the Constitution of Kenya as well as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets (4.1) and 4.5 on universal access to basic education and gender equality and inclusion respectively.

Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) a Canadian based organization that mobilizes the media to change lives has also been supporting journalists here in Kenya and globally, with storytelling grants and capacity building on reporting different thematic topics. These include stories on gender-based violence, women's representation, reproductive health and rights, access to education, Female Genital Mutilation, and gender equality and climate change among others. As at August 2022, JHR had released over 200 storytelling grants to facilitate in-depth and data-driven reporting on the different topics.

The Earth Journalism Network (EJN) provides storytelling grants to further the understanding of the importance of biodiversity in East Africa and region-specific threats to biodiversity conservation. EJN offers trainings, webinars and small grants for journalists and media-related organizations, which have helped reporters to better cover the world's most pressing environmental problems. The organization announced grants worth US\$1,200 for up to 10 journalists from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda to produce in-depth biodiversity and conservation feature stories in East Africa.

One caveat that accompanied the announcement was a precondition to grantees that the published stories and/or broadcasts disclose EJM support by including a tagline: This story was produced with support from Internews' Earth Journalism Network. Notably though, this requirement did not manifest strongly with other grant makers reviewed herein. The EJM call also indicated that the published stories and broadcasts are not exclusively the products of the airing/publishing media outlets, emphasizing on the rights to edit, republish, broadcast and distribute freely as long as they have been published/broadcast in the supported media enterprise. This particular finding was replicated in other grants documents reviewed herein.

However, the EJM approach is contrary to what KELIN and partners had prescribed earlier on regarding the editorial independence of journalists. KELIN had indicated that they were not keen on stories supported by their grants being a pre-condition for increasing their visibility. Important to note is that the grants from these intermediary organizations incorporate capacity building either before or during the story production process.

#### **4.3.3 Major components of the storytelling grants**

When the Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa (BMIA) and Ford Foundation (2018) partnered to establish the Community Media Fund (CMF), the intention was to build capacity of community media journalists and citizen journalists in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa to produce independent, reliable news content focused on issues impacting local communities. As the fund administrator, Hivos Eastern Africa disbursed the funds to intermediary organizations such as the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) and the Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMMNET); and Mtaani radio, a community media outlet based in Nairobi. The partnership aimed at enhancing the capacity of community media journalists and supported them with small

storytelling grants to promote in-depth reporting on social justice, financial literacy, governance and accountability. The end goal of the initiative was to drive inclusive economic and human development locally, regionally and nationally.

Thus, beyond the financial support, the fund benefited journalists directly as the intermediary organizations and respective community media outlets provided capacity building to individual journalists to file investigative reports on the key thematic issues identified by the grant. The beneficiaries were able to produce and disseminate in-depth media content on their host communities, focusing on transparency and accountability, financial journalism, financial literacy, greater access to data, and social justice. This approach places emphasis on the importance of specialized knowledge and skills in the production and dissemination of quality content to a sustainable news media enterprise. Ojo (2018) posits that sustainability of news media enterprises encompasses a self-sustaining operation of news organizations in the production of quality journalism in a functioning socio-political environment, which is critical for editorial independence. This means that news media enterprises are empowered to develop social capital through production of quality local content, thus contributing to their overall institutional and financial sustainability.

As already indicated earlier, the Kenya Media Assessment report (Mwita, 2021) while recommending story grants as a solution to lessen the financial resource constraints for media enterprises, proposed capacity-building to be provided alongside the story grants as a precursor to high quality of journalism, linking it to the skills and capacity empowerment. The report noted that grants for journalists and news media enterprises have been known to help improve the quality of journalism, with both capacity-building for journalists helping county-based journalists adopt specialized and investigative reporting.

As observed with calls for grant applications announced by AMWIK, JHR and MCK respectively, such capacity building comes in the form of training and mentorship of the would-be content producers in reporting on the thematic issue at that particular time. JHR for instance provides mandatory training for journalists as a prequalification for its storytelling grants while mentorship is provided to everyone who successfully gets shortlisted for financial grants.

An analysis of calls for storytelling grant applications announced by JHR (2021) and the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK, 2021) provided mentorship as a package for all the successful grants recipients. For the Fund for Investigative Journalism (FIJ), grant recipients get an opportunity to be paired with a seasoned investigative reporter to serve as a mentor during the story production duration. The mentorship however appears to be an optional provision by the grantors in some instances, going by the analysis of MCK thematic grants announced in 2021.

In the climate change, gender, governance as well as the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) story grant categories, MCK (2021) asked potential applicants to indicate if they would require either technical or editorial assistance or both, and to specify the kind of support. This was a departure from what MCK had indicated as a near compulsory approach on mentorship while announcing its multi-thematic grants earlier in August 2021.

All successful grantees will be assigned a mentor to offer editorial guidance and support in identifying credible information sources, research skills, storytelling techniques and presentation. Grantees are expected to participate in all mentor sessions and consult regularly on their story development before submitting it for publication (MCK, 2021).

The mentorship takes shape in the form of grantees sharing drafts of their articles with the assigned mentors for additional input and suggestions. On skills development support, an analysis of the MCK memo announcing a list of grantees in July 2021 indicated that grant recipients would



be mentored on how to advance their journalism skills, on among other aspects; framing, simplifying, unpacking and interpreting complex data. While announcing the outcome of the grant applications, MCK Chief Executive Officer said thus;

Our aim is to create an impact and a shift on how some of these stories are covered and reported. We hope to see more stories in the above areas that will not only communicate but also play a key role in provoking action (MCK CEO).

This clearly indicates a desire to make sure that the skills and knowledge acquisition by the grant recipients strengthens their understanding of the thematic issues they are set to report on, and also the approaches of telling impactful stories. The provision also resonates with what AMWIK, JHR, FIJ and other media intermediary organizations expect of their grant recipients as reflected in their documents, that is, a commitment to keep the assigned mentor/s informed of their progress.

#### **4.4 Reasons underpinning storytelling grants in Kenya**

All the study interviewees agreed that the storytelling grants had a strong positive effect on improving the quality of journalism. There was an overall agreement that the improved content quality translated to an increase in sponsorships for media enterprises, thereby affecting their financial sustainability. Notably, this effect is more significant for community media and alternative News Media Organizations compared to the mainstream media enterprises. They said that the positive effects on media sustainability was influenced by the bridging of content production costs as well as what individual journalists termed as individual career growth.

#### 4.4.1 Bridging of Content Production Costs

The study findings indicate that funding content production is quite an expensive undertaking for all cadres of media enterprises. Whereas media enterprises are keen on publishing quality stories regularly, all the 18 grant recipients interviewed held that they are often constrained by the meager budgets set aside for productions of in-depth feature stories, which is critical for a media enterprise to stay in operation. Instead, they observed that oftentimes local media only supported coverage of press conferences in local government offices within their reach, as that was considered less expensive.

It also emerged that the limited financial resources are only released if and when it is clear that a particular story has potential to generate additional revenue for the media enterprise. This view was particularly observed by mainstream media journalists and editors, who also held that it's often a long process to get funds approved to do feature stories. Speaking for the small and medium size newsrooms that often have no clear revenue sources by virtue of the legal framework that constrains their revenue sources, informants noted that financial sustainability for community media and alternative media platforms is often at the mercy of intermittent sponsorships. For instance, the Communications Authority (CA) documents for registering community radio stipulates a requirement that the registrants provide the anticipated revenue stream from sponsorships and other sources, describing how they intend to generate income, specifically to sustain its operations and improve the services, not for profit-making.

It means their employees sometimes have to go without pay even as they continue to serve their communities. This is unlike the mainstream media enterprises that boast of multiple revenue streams, notwithstanding the turbulent media environment that has generally impacted negatively

on overall media sustainability globally. These findings underscore the struggles that media enterprises are experiencing in their efforts to meet audience demands for quality content (Owilla et al., 2022), while also pursuing financial sustainability.

In essence, the financial inadequacies have intensified the pressure on media houses and media managers. With the financially struggling media landscape, the study established that the management is often at a crossroads on whether to pay recurring bills or invest in story production costs. All the interviewees concurred that the expected monthly remuneration is often not guaranteed, making their financial sustainability a cumbersome issue. This pushed local journalists to always be on the lookout for storytelling grants.

On a positive note, the study findings show that by significantly lowering the costs of content production, the storytelling grants eased the burden on station managers and their editors by relieving them of the pressures of looking for finances to get their journalists to the field, as well as communications and meal costs during news gathering. A station manager affirmed the study findings saying;

The money that we used to fund journalists to do such stories has now been channeled to fund other organizational projects (SM003).

The manager noted that incidences where costs of sourcing stories from far-flung areas are high, pooling resources together makes it easier to get great stories from areas never covered before. From the media intermediary organization's perspective, one of the two interviewees observed that community media managers have been able to build on the grants to get multiple stories from their journalists. These sentiments agree with Owilla et al., (2022) in the Media Futures East

Africa (MFEA) report on media viability, which indicates that community media outlets maximized the grants to save on their resources. Perhaps this explains why the impact is greater for them compared to the mainstream media enterprises.

All the grant recipients working for alternative media and their community media counterparts indicated that many times they thrive on their passion to keep doing the job. They observed that the grants have come in handy to give them a leeway to tell stories that are hardly supported by their media outlets and therefore rarely told.

Through the grants, I am able to do stories which I would traditionally not be able to because of tight financial budgets the newsrooms are currently facing (G010).

This is a demonstration that the storytelling grants not only kept the journalists going in their respective workplaces, but also enabled the media enterprises they work for to retain talent longer. This helped in alleviating challenges related to journalists' turnover. The interviewees added that oftentimes with the delays in processing finances to support content production, the grants have bridged the financial gap for journalists with promising story ideas.

Interviewee 17's media outlet for instance, provides little and sometimes 'zero facilitation' to enable them work on their stories, emphasizing that story grants 'enable me to cater for production costs like transport, meals and accommodation.' Interviewee nine agreed, reiterating thus;

They are a great help in facilitating me to execute different stories especially when limited by lack of enough funds or delays in budget approvals by the media house (G009).

This assertion mirrors the views of mentor number one, who held that some of the stories would never have been told were it not for the storytelling grants support.

If you look at the reporting on issues of gender, women and leadership, how women are rising into the newsroom and things that affect women journalists, these are stories that were hardly told before. But with the story grants we've been able to tell the stories especially of sexual harassment in the media, profile more women running for political office, look at how violations as not just mere violations but also explore their links to human rights, and look at GBV not just as statistics but as human rights issues (M001).

This confirms the extent to which voices of sections of the society, especially women and girls are less amplified in the media and therefore their issues remaining under-reported or often lopsided. Indeed, the grants have made reporting on issues that affect women mostly, not just superficial, but also showed that they are basic human rights that have to be respected, by slowing down on emotional and sensational reporting.

Conversely, a comparative analysis of responses from journalists working in mainstream media enterprises and their counterparts in community and alternative media revealed a sharp contrast on the extent to which storytelling grants impacted on their respective media financial sustainability approaches. While content production costs for community media enterprises were reported as wholly absorbed, interviewees from the mainstream media held that such grants only covered a portion of their attendant costs, leaving them at the mercy of their line editors to facilitate the rest of the logistical needs.

As a result, it was difficult to attribute the financial sustainability or lack of it in the case of mainstream media to the storytelling grants. This disparity was more prevalent for journalists reporting for Television that require enormous finances and human resources to produce a single story. Based on the foregoing, key informants observed that whereas storytelling grants were useful in bridging the funding gaps relating to content production, the amounts were inadequate to record significant impact on financial sustainability of mainstream media. It is therefore a clear

hint that community media outlets have benefited more significantly from the contributions of storytelling grants to their financial sustainability compared to mainstream media enterprises. The findings seem to suggest the need to categorize different media outlets by type so that grants are also tailor-made to suit their unique funding needs. For instance, informants in mainstream media seemed to agree that having small closed budgets was limiting the contribution of grants to their financial sustainability.

Despite the positive assessment on costs of content production, informants also observed that grants just meet costs for particular stories where the issuer has interest, comes once in a while and sometimes one applies and does not get, making them unpredictable. Further, the study finds that grants do not extend to operational or institutional costs of running the media enterprise per se. Notwithstanding the challenges, informants seemed to agree that the act of chipping in with costs of production still enables even the mainstream media enterprises to financially stay afloat, albeit in a negligible way, in the phase of dwindling revenues from advertising sources.

It also emerged that with the storytelling grants, a media enterprise does not have to commit so many journalists on its payroll and instead can opt to work with freelancers to meet their content demands. This was identified as a means of cutting down on operational costs on recurring staff salaries and benefits thus reducing overhead expenses. The researcher also made an attempt to understand what motivates journalists to continuously look for support from grant-making organizations.

While a majority observed that it was the opportunity to travel to areas considered marginalized and under-reported, for some, one recurring response was that most media enterprises in

Kenya do not have adequate finances to support their journalists to travel and compile in-depth data driven stories frequently, about their communities;

As a young journalist each time I apply for grants I get an opportunity to benefit from mentors attached to me. I am also passionate about telling human interest stories and such stories are expensive to do. Our local media houses are not able to set a budget to work on them, so I apply for grants from different organizations which enable me to go to distant areas and meet my sources wherever they are (G008).

Whereas it was not clear whether the travels enabled grant recipients to tell under-reported issues, it is clear that the ability to meet sources in their natural setting provided an opportunity to tell authentic stories.

#### **4.4.2 Personal Welfare**

At a personal level, the study finds that the storytelling grants have enabled journalists to sustain themselves and stand on their own by managing to pay their personal recurring bills. Study informants noted that with the financial constraints that have made it impossible for their media outlets to pay staff salaries for close to half a year, they were forced to operate virtually. Thus the grants were instrumental in catering for their financial needs and enabled them to continue taking care of their recurring bills while still remaining in the journalism profession.

In fact, we are now surviving only on story grants. It has also catered to our financial problems, making it easier to go to work (G004).

I work for a media station that has been experiencing financial turbulence. As a result, my salary is delayed for months, which affects my ability to work efficiently. Some of us depend on grants (G005).

Without the grants, I would be unable to tell the stories I have been able to tell, especially with the delayed salary (G006).

These testimonies reflect a unanimous consideration of the grants as a source of livelihoods and economic empowerment, without which recipients were likely to quit whenever new opportunities

emerged, to manage the high cost of living. They also confirm the widely held concern among leading media stakeholders in Kenya, on the plight of journalists being either on off pay or half pay for a protracted period, with a majority working without contracts.

While agreeing with the sentiments, mentor number one observed that the grants have helped sustain journalists and motivates them to keep documenting and telling stories while also having a source of livelihood without straining themselves. The mentor acknowledged that the media is going through a financial turmoil caused by many factors, including the Covid-19, and held that without the grants support, “some of them who are really good journalists would not even have an opportunity to write.”

Because of the mentorship that we’ve been offering, some of those who have lost jobs from the mainstream media have been able to survive because they are able to continue telling stories, and countering the challenge of not having a job. They are able to employ the knowledge to do other stories that are not just benefiting the society, but are also creating employment for them. (M001).

This observation is a testament that mentorship as a capacity strengthening support, has been able to build the journalists to become better in terms of the skills, the knowledge and approaches they use to tell their stories, thereby having a lasting effect that can never be taken away from the journalists. Besides, it is important to note that some of the content can go into online platforms that include own blogs and podcasts thereby enable one to build a portfolio of their work.

Asked a follow-up question on whether it would be more effective to channel the funds to the media instead of individual journalists, grant recipients favored a hybrid model. Whereas there was concurrence that institutional grants would help the media outlets to meet their overhead costs, interviewees argued that sometimes such an approach may not respond to the specific needs for individual journalists while in the field. These observations tell how the storytelling grants have



been helpful in bridging the funding gap and therefore keeping the media enterprises in operation, and individual journalists financially stable.

## **4.5 Effects of story grants on media quality content production in Kenya**

### **4.5.1 Improved Quality of Media Content**

Financial strength and stability is necessary for consistent producing and dissemination of high-quality journalism over a long period of time (Owilla et al., 2022). The research also pursued the media managers and editors' assessment of the quality of content their journalists produced through the storytelling grants, and the factors that could have contributed to that quality or lack of it thereof. In the context of this study, quality content was assessed based on the premise of journalistic professionalism and independence of editorial oversight. The study findings indicate that grant beneficiaries were able to produce balanced, accurate, in-depth, data-driven and well researched long reads that were considered impactful in addressing issues considered relevant to their audiences.

The findings agree with Benson (2018) on funders being keen on stories that impact the society, which he defines partly as a story being widely read or viewed, leading to a change of mind or behavior, or a change of legislation. Relevance as a factor of content quality was measured by the timeliness of the story and the extent of its focus on the local context. Informants attributed the improved content quality to the attendant mentorship sessions. Interviewee eight observed that whenever he receives a storytelling grant, he has the pressure of delivering a quality story. "Thus doing this over and over again has made me make it a norm because I need to prove that the story

is worth the grant, and in doing that I have improved my skills on script writing and also production,” he explained. The interviewee held that with regular grants and mentorship it becomes a practice to produce and publish high quality stories that meet professional standards, noting the mentors’ contributions in properly framing questions, besides suggesting relevant sources and data to make the stories appealing to the reader or listener.

Mentor number one concurred, observing that journalists have been able to dig deeper to show what specific rights are violated, and demand for accountability from duty beares charged with the reporsibility of handling these issues.

This has expanded the knowledge and the approach to tell the story in a more creative and in-depth way for us to be able to identify the needs and actions that need to be taken, and also bring out the gaps in a professional manner (M001).

This observation was corroborated by interviewee four who observed that other than benefiting the grantors by driving their agenda, the mentorship also shaped and sharpened the stories, and clarified concepts to make the stories more focused.

I've sharpened my pitch writing skills and my art of writing long reads. These days, I celebrate myself whenever I write long reads because they just read so well. They are captivating and simply so 'sweet' to read (G004).

This feedback is a strong demonstration of professional excellence in journalism. As a result of the many grants received, the interviewee emphasized that as a result of the learning obtained from the many senior journalists often attached to her, she is now considered a resource by her colleagues. “My colleagues in the counties and head office have also found me to be a good and dependable resource. They seek my guidance in pitching and writing their stories, the interviewee explains, adding: “My editor also refers correspondents and reporters to me for guidance.”

Another feedback that dominated the informants' submissions was the insistence by mentors for grantees to quote authorities as well as make reference to legal frameworks and statistics with respect to the particular topics being reported about. Informants agreed that such aspects are very important in telling a balanced, fair and accurate story that leads to a stronger journalistic professionalism in addressing the highlighted situation.

The study findings also associated the high content quality to the training on specialized reporting of the thematic topics sponsored by the grants. The study informants agreed that grantors often have an interest in the stories because they are focussed on a particular objective, citing topics such as gender, climate change, and health. Interviewee one observed that previously she used to tell ordinary stories, but that changed as she began benefiting from story grants.

Personally, I would do stories as long as it's a story and that was it. By the time I got my first grant from Info-Nile and got the opportunity to learn through their mentorships and training, it changed how I do my stories (G001).

The interviewee further enumerated some of the changes in their storytelling as being able to source for good interviewees, and incorporate relevant and verifiable data for credibility. Given that the grant mostly came from independent media organizations that have placed integrity and professionalism at the center of their work, mentor number two observed that journalists largely stuck to the topics/subjects of the stories such as health, issues on gender, and climate change long after their grants support had ended.

This has encouraged specialization since mentors have largely been experienced journalists who grew up in a strict professional era where integrity and professional were the guiding light (M002).

This brings into fore, inter-generational mentorship, and clearly demonstrates the importance of passing down the knowledge and longtime experience to upcoming journalists.

Interviewees also held that they have increasingly been telling stories with diverse viewpoints, observing that the mentorship sessions taught them unique styles of telling different stories. “I never knew why reporting with a gender lens is important until when I started accessing the grants and mentorship opportunities,” interviewee five said, adding that it has also positively impacted their editorial policies to ensure the sources are balanced by gender.

Most of the young journalists who work at Radio Domus, have been empowered to depart from the textbook journalism they learn at school, and focus their energies to the thematic stories aligned to issues affecting their communities, the community station manager observed, noting that the mentors have always assisted their journalists in bringing out objective and quality stories.

#### **4.5.2 Independence of Editorial Oversight**

Editorial independence was considered relevant in helping ascertain whether the journalists were comfortable with their mentors providing the final review and approval of their stories before publishing. Asked to comment on how mentorship was affecting the framing of their stories and editorial oversight and decision-making, interviewees gave a generally positive review, save for a few dissenting voices.

A majority of the study informants observed that their mentors only helped in affirming their story ideas through guidance on what additional information and sources to consider.

I am the one who comes up with the story idea taking into consideration our editorial policies (G010).

While this shows little negative influence on editorial decision-making, the informant observed that editors often have the last voice on whether to publish or not to publish a story.

The informants further held that these stories most often follow the existing journalistic standards which then make them publishable in most places without much ado as mentors help in streamlining their story lines. In any case should an editor have an issue of judgment then the approval can be stopped before the journalist is taken in for a mentorship session or awarded the grant to pursue a since the pitch always presents the idea in advance, a mentee observed.

However, interviewee 17 warned that whereas grants help a recipient to tell stories without worrying about transport, meals and accommodation, it can stifle creativity and push the donor's agenda if editorial independence is not observed, thus becoming more of a PR vehicle. Further concerns of interference with internal editorial oversight responsibilities emerged, with a grantee who also serves as a sub-editor noting that mentorship has not been fully embraced by the editorial desks thus posing a challenge for grantees when submitting stories which do not adhere to the internal editorial oversight guidelines. For instance, an informant observed that whereas the concentration level of radio listeners begins to fade after minute four, scenarios where mentors push journalists to produce radio episodes longer than what their editorial rules stipulate were alarming.

Sometimes a mentor wants you to change the script to fit what s/he feels is right. This brings me to a conflict. Should you follow your editorial policy and irk them or do you follow their rules to continue receiving the support – (G005).

With this dilemma resulting in occasional delays in publishing funded content, interviewee 4 proposed that it was important for grantors through the assigned mentors to often finding a mutually

agreeable balance on the extent of editorial oversight, “without which grants could stifle creativity while pushing the donor's agenda thus becoming more of a public relations vehicle.”

### **4.5.3 Career Growth**

Mentorship as a capacity building strategy is one of the greatest pillars of a sustainable media enterprise. However, informants noted that most of their newsrooms pay little attention to training and capacity building, which the grants do through the mentorship sessions. Most grants offer mentorship opportunities to grant recipients, which helps in strengthening their capacity for continued professional competitiveness and knowledge to report on their beat. When the mentees get the grant, the lessons learned out of writing or producing a particular story trickle down to other stories thereafter.

This has improved the skills set for journalists and how they handle their sources to produce and package their stories. An interviewee reported that a number of journalists in her cycle have grown in the journalism field through the mentorship sessions, observing that they have built networks from across the globe through which experiences and knowledge sharing continue to thrive. She held that every journalist needs such networking opportunities for career growth.

Through constructive criticism that one gets from the mentors, informants also held that they gained requisite knowledge to be able to capture the unique story angles and perspectives of multiple sources and where to incorporate analytics and data in a story. “I have to confess that before I started receiving the grants I had a big problem in identifying an angle to work on. I would mix lots of story ideas in one story. But since then I am able to identify an issue and pursue it to a

conclusion,” one informant explained, sentiments that were echoed by other informants who observed that they have learnt to narrow down to particular unique angles they may not have thought of before, “unlike before when my pitch would be all over tackling many things.”

This testimony introduces the aspect of pitching as an indicator for career growth and journalistic professionalism. One grant recipient who also serves as a news editor observed that pitching is a big problem for a majority of journalists. The interviewee emphasized on the need for grantmakers to organize regular pitching lessons with their potential grantees. Despite the gap in pitching, it is worth noting that grant recipients generally felt that the mentorship sessions increasingly sharpened their skills on how to write winning story ideas. Informants noted that they were increasingly able to convince editors about their story ideas with ease. “This has helped my editor to permit me to carry my stories once I come up with an idea. From how I frame the ideas, how I build the story in the body and to the tail has encouraged my editors to carry on with it.”

It also emerged strongly that mentors played the role of personal coaches whom the grantees could consult from time to time and therefore helped them in coming up with unique story angles in the context of the theme and purpose of the grant. It also enables grant recipients to network with the mentors beyond the grants cycle, and linkages with expert sources and alternative publishing platforms.

The grants I get have made me access more opportunities. Working with more experienced journalists has also boosted my storytelling abilities in terms of research, interviewing skills, scripting as well as connecting me with relevant expert sources who I may not ordinarily get (G009).

Interviewee two, a multimedia freelance journalist, reported how the grants have helped in carefully determining where to publish stories based on potential impact. The interviewee defined

impact in relation to potential listenership or readership. Both interviewees four and ten held that the one-on-one support which they said often lacks in their busy newsrooms, helped journalists in updating their knowledge in the field of journalism. Interviewee ten claimed that in the newsroom one is given an assignment by an editor who is also in charge of several other reporters, adding: “So you really don't get quality input unless you really really need it.”

Interviewees also noted that they learn something new every time irrespective of level of experience, enabling them to get the bigger picture in their stories. This was attributed to the exposure to different mentors for the different storytelling grants, who offered alternative viewpoints and worldviews thus enriching one's storytelling and journalistic skills. Most of the mentors are experienced journalists with a wide bank of expert sources, expansive networks, and therefore come in handy to link you up with them;

Most mentors are veteran journalists whose wealth of experience really comes in handy. The fact that they have been there and done that is an advantage to young journalists. It helps to not only avoid the mistakes they made but also to build on the lessons learnt. They are also well networked and can link you with almost any source you are looking for (G010).

Interviewees also observed that their career growth was shaped by the mentors helping them to identify the under-reported story angles, besides helping them avoid what others consider tired stories or story angles. This study therefore established that grant recipients were able and continue to tap into the knowledge and experience of their mentors as extra hands supporting them.

For a majority of the informants, mentorship was also seen as instrumental in opening up their horizons and expanding their understanding and knowledge on topical issues and interviewing skills, ‘instead of just focusing on a narrow angle of a story.’ This implies that mentorship worked in promoting their professionalism, enabling them to answer the ‘so what’ question in their



reporting. Informants acknowledged that the knowledge and experience resulting from the mentorship sessions had contributed to them developing high quality educational features that not only impacted positively on the society, but also propelled them into winning journalism excellence awards in various categories.

An informant noted thus, “The grants I got from Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) opened my eyes more and leveraged my writing too through rigorous training and mentorships which enabled me to do a good story which won me an award.” Interviewee four contended that someone could be interested to read it and may decide to do something to change the situation in his own capacity or at government or CSO level. As a result, media colleagues in the counties and head office considered the interviewee to be a good and dependable resource for guidance on effective storytelling.

They seek my guidance in pitching and writing their stories. My editor also refers correspondents and reporters to me for guidance. That's a clear sign of my professional excellence (G004).

This observation demonstrates that the storytelling grants are contributing to the passing down of the experience gained from long serving journalists, to emerging journalists who have not been able to access similar support. This agrees with mentor two on the importance of strengthening intergenerational exchange of knowledge and skills.

As someone who started as a volunteer in a community radio station and then became a freelance journalist, interviewee two rated mentorship as top one of the most cherished aspects of the storytelling grants, noting that the skills have kept journalists going in the media industry:

If I compare myself 1 year ago; the knowledge I have acquired through mentorship is much and has seen me rewarded. Some of my stories made it to the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA) finals. One actually won me an award in the

AJEA 2022, while all the stories that have won me awards or recognition were done after a mentorship program and training (G002).

From this explanation, it is clear that the recognition of professional excellence is considered by grants recipients as an indication that the more people read a well done story the more it becomes impactful to the society, and the more their efforts are appreciated.

Journalists also gained professional soft skills on how to deal with stereotyping in the society, and the understanding of why early site surveys are necessary before visiting a place for interviews. Soft skills are critical elements of professional journalism and enhances self-awareness of a journalist whenever out in the field. Other aspects of career growth that informants highlighted include a boost in research skills, interviewing skills, scripting and presentation of stories.

#### **4.6 Challenges in the uptake of storytelling grants**

The study established that more often only a few journalists consistently access storytelling grants from multiple funders, while journalists also tend to submit the same story idea to different funders for support. Mentor number one was particularly concerned at the level of honesty of grant recipients, noting thus;

Sometimes I think as the industry or the development partners involved, we need to think of a way that ensures there is not duplication, that people are not just doing stories because there is a story-grant; or people getting funding from different partners for the same story that is to produced (M001).

This observation indicates that if grant-makers don't act quickly to streamline grantmaking for storytelling, then it would be difficult to measure holistic effects of the grants first on individual journalists, and then on the general media fraternity. Indeed, it has a potential of not impacting a large section of the media fraternity positively, thereby hindering holistic media development. It

also calls to question the integrity of journalists, and therefore the need to self-reflect before holding other duty bearers accountable.

On editorial oversight roles, some of the interviewees' feedback also pointed to a disconnect in the way grants are fashioned, holding that increasingly, editors felt threatened by the entry of mentors assigned to guide grants recipients in producing their stories. They further accused grant offering organizations of paying keen attention to impact, accountability and the thematic approach at the expense of current affairs that have a lifespan.

The disconnect spilled into editorial decisions where stories took too long to publish till some were overtaken by events and therefore shelved for more fresh ones. This in the long run strained the relationship with grantmakers. It was however not corroborated by other interviewees, although it could signify that increasingly, fewer editors will be involved in approving stories once the large chunk of reviews is already supported by mentors. The net effect of the editorial input of the mentors, as this research finds, is that there may be no need for strong internal editorial teams anymore in future, indicating that the role of internal editors was slowly fading away.

Station manager one observed that whereas grants were impacting positively on journalism and therefore the financial sustainability especially for media enterprises, other negative repercussions involved grants recipients feeling like they could no longer be assigned any duties without facilitation, “which is a narrative that needs urgent addressing for them to understand the whole concept of grants.” This sentiment was supported by the media editor, who argued that once a journalist was handed a grant, they were more likely to act in favor of the organization issuing grants. “The storytelling itself tends to 'praise' the giver, as opposed to the issues the story is sup-

posed to help.” Notably though, there were no widespread claims on this position, thereby confirming that grants do not necessarily serve narrow interests of the grantors, but seek to work for the greater good of the media.

Another notable challenge was the finding that some media houses had ‘unscrupulous editors’ who saw the grants as an opportunity to exploit their juniors by either demanding part of the money, or denying those neediest in terms of training the opportunity for mentorship and grants support. A representative of a media intermediary organization observed that potential grants recipients were discouraged from reaching out for mentorship or training opportunities because of the alleged harassment from their line supervisors.

On the same breadth, another intermediary organization representative observed that some media outlets treat stories from grants as Public Relations (PR) pieces and refuse to publish them, even though a number find them ready content which they never spent any money on. Further, there were fears that some media outlets were likely to sell the stories from grants to third parties without acknowledging the authors or sharing any benefits accruing from such extended publications. This is an indication that media enterprises have not fully comprehended how best to initiate a mutually beneficial partnership with the grants-giving organizations, hence an opportunity.

Notwithstanding the fears, the study findings indicate that the differences had not reached a point considered to be beyond resolving considering the positive gains recorded in reducing production costs. It was observed that at the end of the day, the journalist better understands their editorial guidelines and is able to balance the expectations of the mentor without breaching the editorial policies.

Notably, the study recommends the need for a win-win situation where the grantors acquaint themselves with the existing editorial policies of the respective media enterprises so that stories are not aired just to meet the grants pre-conditions.

#### **4.7 Effects of story grants on media financial sustainability in Kenya**

The study findings suggest that the resultant quality content had a positive turn-around effect on the financial sustainability of respective media enterprises. Considering the prohibitive costs of financing content productions, storytelling grants have come in handy to bridge the deficit, thereby significantly affecting positively the media financial sustainability, particularly for community media. This includes covering the costs for travels, accommodation and airtime facilitation. That in the process, a media enterprise becomes competitive due to the long-form features that make a media stand out and stay ahead of the pack by attracting more program sponsors.

As a result, journalists have been handed an opportunity to extend their journalism out of the newsroom to the field, and research and compile in-depth stories which ordinarily would have needed more financial and technical capacity. In the process, the media enterprises, especially community media outlets have been able to save on some of the stories that would generally have required huge investments to produce. This has helped sustain continued operations by having enough in-depth content to broadcast or publish regularly over a period of time.

However, the seemingly strong link between high quality content and media financial sustainability is contrary to findings by Owilla, et al., (2022) in the Media Futures East Africa report which indicates quite an insignificant relationship between the two. Perhaps another study could be done to specifically focus on mainstream media. However, the study informants observed that the training and mentorship sessions grounded them on their beat thereby enabling them to cut a niche for themselves. The finding agrees with Owilla, et al., (2022), recommending the need to

invest more on specialized journalism training. This is particularly important for community media enterprises where investing in capacity building is often hardly a priority.

## **Conclusion**

Grants have played a key role in bridging the costs of content production, while also building the journalistic skills and competencies of grant recipients. Further, storytelling grants have helped reduce the rate of staff turnover in community media enterprises while on the other hand, through improved journalistic professionalism, opened new and better opportunities for journalists. However, it is clear that the effect of story grants on the financial sustainability of mainstream media enterprises was less significant or negligible compared to the mainstream media enterprises. The study finds that grants could slightly impact mainstream media enterprises only if the approach considers funding thematic desks instead of an individual journalist or freelancer who publishes only when the grants are available. Informants hold that notable financial sustainability works best with continuous or longer term rather than what they consider piecemeal grants. Finally, grants enabled media enterprises to attract advertisers on the basis of the quality content generated.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

At the beginning of this study the researcher sought to critically analyze the effects of storytelling grants on media sustainability in Kenya. It is important to note that most of the questions that the research explored were adequately answered. However, some of the answers were largely one sided, with interviewees largely reporting how the storytelling grants positively affected their storytelling, and by extension the media enterprises they work for. This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the document reviews and key informant interviews that were conducted on the topic.

#### 5.2 Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the philosophy underpinning storytelling grants, analyze the extent to which storytelling grants affect content quality; and assess the effects of such grants on media financial sustainability.

The findings indicate that there was a correlation between content quality and media financial sustainability. It is also clear that the contribution is indirect, often dependent on the resultant content quality, journalistic professionalism, and savings generated from reduced costs for content production. The resultant high quality content has been lauded as the spark that has attracted increased listenership owing to audiences' met needs. Good content attracts partnerships which translate to increased revenues for a media enterprise, through more business and sponsorship support for their quality programming. A study informant observed that quality stories always increase listenership "which is directly proportional to increase in sales thus contributing to our

sustainability.” Further, the financial investments and accompanying mentorship have also taken away the costs related to regular capacity building for journalists’ professional growth.

Further, the grants helped retain journalists longer in the newsroom. They also enabled journalists to travel to areas where issues have been under-reported, which means that voices of marginalized communities have come to the limelight courtesy of the storytelling grants. A study informant noted that with such support, the public has an opportunity to read, watch or listen to issues happening in less talked about regions hence promoting inclusivity. This has given such media outlets greater competitive advantage over their peers not able to highlight such issues hence contributing to their sustainability in the long run. Factors attributed to the improved content quality and professionalism among grantees were listed as below;

- Strengthened networks with mentors who then share diverse experiences and knowledge with their mentees.
- Exposure to multiple sources to bring in new perspectives and worldviews.
- Expanded horizon among mentees such that they are able to think ‘outside the box’ and embrace unique story angles as suggested by their mentors.

However, it is worth noting that the key informants identified the intermittent frequency of issuing the grants as a gap that was limiting the extent of the contributions of storytelling grants towards wholesome media sustainability, especially on mainstream media in Kenya.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Media sustainability results from a combination of factors, key among them being quality content and professional journalism espoused by a media enterprise. A media enterprise known for in-depth, solution-oriented and high quality and impact driven content is able to attract other



partners to its fold. This translates to additional revenues in form of advertising and increased audience attraction. The end result is increased financial flow hence the financial sustainability of the media enterprise. With the financial support to journalists, content production costs have been catered for thus freeing media enterprises from worrying about such costs. Media enterprises can therefore significantly benefit from such grants, which bridge the gap in their revenue, and help them get quality content regularly.

Depending on the amount of the grants, it's possible for some of the media enterprises, especially smaller outlets and startups to treat these as alternative revenue streams, at least in the short term. These findings are in agreement with what Teece et al., (1997) in his Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), refer to as “the firm’s ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address the rapidly changing environments” (p. 516). Part of adjusting to the new norm of a financially turbulent industry is therefore to work towards aligning media content segments with thematic areas that different grants focus on, while also exploiting the capacity building to one's advantage.

This will specifically impact on lowering the costs of content production. It means that enterprises must be willing to make appropriate internal adjustments in their programming or content formats. This could mean tapping into the mentorship as part of continuous learning (Oliver, 2018) and strengthening internal skills set in specialized reporting (Leonard-Barton, 1992). This agrees with Mahoney and Tang (2021) who recommend the need to invest in employee expertise and lifelong learning in a variety of specializations, which then conforms to the thematic approach by grantmakers. Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) emphasize the need for strategic collaborations with external experts to contribute to their own sustainability (Samsudin and Ismail, 2019).

## 5.4 Recommendations

The positive reviews on the impact of storytelling grants on media financial sustainability notwithstanding, there is a general consensus that adjustments would go a long way in making the grants more effective. The suggested adjustments are assigned to philanthropy organizations and the intermediary stakeholders involved with the grants, and by virtue of being media stakeholders whose critical role in media development cannot be overemphasized. Others are specific to both grant recipients and the managers and/or owners of respective media enterprises. For the managers and media owners, identifying and exploiting opportunities arising from the story grants package and adjusting their operations to capitalize on a mutually beneficial partnership is key (Oliver, 2018; Samsudin and Ismail, 2019; and Teece et al., 1997). Below are the specific recommendations;

**Create a media development or journalism fund:** There is a need for private foundations and international organizations that invest in media development to find a common approach in supporting media sustainability. The intention is to establish a funders consortium that pools all financial resources into a common funding basket and develop a unilateral grants disbursement criteria for different levels of media enterprises and journalists, irrespective of the thematic leanings of the partners. The fund can also provide support to journalists in terms of enabling them to access certain sources with legal expertise on issues, access to equipment to aid their joint story production processes (recorders, cameras etc) as well as finances.

**Convene consultations with media outlets editorial teams:** Regular engagements with editorial teams were considered as necessary to help agree on the extent of editorial oversight support by mentors. Also, interviewees noted the need to enable mentors, and by extension the

grant makers to understand editorial gaps that might hinder the effectiveness of storytelling grants in enhancing quality, solution-based and impactful journalism.

**Customizations of storytelling grants:** Considering the unique resource needs for different levels of media enterprise platforms, informants suggested the need to customize storytelling grants in two major ways as follows;

- I. **Regional focus:** That grants be designed to respond to specific regional diversities such geographical reach. It was observed that most regions, especially those occupied by marginalized communities are so vast that giving journalists in those areas grants equal to the ones in densely populated areas limits their ability to not only deliver quality, but also impactful solution stories. For instance, considering the distance where the story is going to be carried, sources to interview and how long it will take one to file the story. Besides extra manpower and finances involved, the areas with a wider geographical coverage also tend to be under-reported.
- II. **Focussed on type of medium:** The study findings indicate that the costs of producing print or radio stories, and sometimes digital content is far much less than costs involved in producing stories for television viewers, where a larger crew and equipment is involved. On this note, there is a need to customize and fashion story grants in a way that accommodates all journalists working in the different types of media.

**Train more journalists on how to develop pitches and also on grant writing:** Feedback from a majority of the interviewees favored an opportunity to undergo further skills development on how to craft effective story ideas. This was not necessarily for winning storytelling grants, but also for their own career growth. Journalists are also encouraged to continuously seek capacity

building opportunities and be able to consult widely whenever they are not clear on requirements for grants. This will enable them to be effective in their pitching and storytelling.

**Grants should have an open budget:** Often when pitching, journalists feel optimistic of doing very unique stories only to realize later on that the amount available cannot fully cover the desired logistics of producing the story. Thus, having an open budget that can be customized for unique stories that require additional resources was recommended. It was noted that if the story idea was good enough and the required budget is beyond what's available, then the grantee and grantor could have a discussion and agree on a given amount. It was suggested that it is better to provide fewer grants with solid and unique story ideas for maximum impact, noting that if journalists are adequately funded then organizations should be able to get value for their money through well told and innovatively executed stories. On this recommendation, perhaps grantmakers need to conduct a needs assessment to be able to determine the funding needs for different investigative stories, thereby categorize the different funding levels in advance.

**Reward system:** There is a need for grantors and their intermediaries to design a reward mechanism specific to their grantees so that the grantees feel motivated to do even more life changing stories. This was considered as a measure of the quality of work they are sponsoring based on feedback from the judges on the grants and mentorship. On this, the researcher recommends that to avoid duplication and the monotony of the awards, that the grant makers consider pooling their resources towards supporting specific categories in the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards (AJEA), a reward event hosted annually by the Media Council of Kenya.

**Technical support:** Beyond the training and mentorship, there is a need for grantmakers to supplement the storytelling grants with a bit of production equipment support. Considering that

journalists and managers working for community media enterprises reported a greater impact of the grants on their financial sustainability, they also held that the lack of equipment was limiting their ability to assign more journalists to produce timely high quality stories. By virtue of their ownership and non-profit making nature, they singled out a lack of important equipment such as sound recorders, mixers and desk tops, that could be addressed. On mentorship, interviewees observed that it would be more relevant to pair them with mentors with whom they share passion and interests.

**Predictable funding cycle:** There is a need to have a model where journalists are able to predict or know when to expect grants announcements and for what duration. That way media enterprises are able to calculate and prepare their journalists to apply for the same and therefore project production costs that may be absorbed by the grants from time to time. Make the story grants long term in the process by providing longer multistory grants. Perhaps this can be tailored to fall around the particular events commemorating certain human rights issues nationally and globally.

There is a need for a mechanism that holds individual journalists accountable for the grants they receive. Journalists who apply for storytelling grants and yet produce articles/ stories that do not meet the quality expectations should be held accountable by being asked to re-do at their own costs under the guidance of a mentor, or refund the disbursements advanced to them. It is also important therefore for grants recipients to use the grants money on what has been approved of it.

There is also a need to tame duplication of funding and ensure journalists are not doing stories just because there are story grants. Precisely, grantors should develop a mechanism for cross checking and be clear that if one gets a grant from one organization then the same is not submitted to another partner for support. On the same breadth, grants recipients have an obligation

to remain honest as they grow in their career. This involves the courage to declare that they have not pitched the same story ideas to different philanthropy organizations and their intermediaries for funding.

As the media financial capacity keeps shrinking, there is also a need to establish a very strong network for all the mentees and bring them together regularly for continuous support, and sharing of experiences and learning.

There is also a need to expand the grants opportunities to other people so it's not just one or a few journalists getting story grants from different partners to do their stories.

There is also a need for radio journalists and their outlets especially, to document and keep a record of their work portfolio. Many times funding organizations ask for links to published works and journalists miss out often for not being able to provide them in time when requested.

Storytelling grants are an easy way of not only adding to the media houses financial sustainability but also adding to the quality of journalism through well researched and data-driven media content. As a result, media enterprises should find a way of aligning their content to fit into the thematic focuses for the funding organizations so as to tap into the grants finances. To achieve this, the study recommends a need for media enterprises to generate quarterly projections that align with respective themes and identify and network with potential philanthropy organizations to support some aspects of their content. Realigning into the mission and the vision of the organization. Look at what the organization stands for and how they would benefit.

Given the financial difficulties that non mainstream media such as Community Media go through, media enterprises need to latch out at opportunities for the training, mentorship associated with the story grants. This way, they will build strong teams and media organizations and ultimately retain their talent.

The media outlets need to deliberately seek to understand the place of grants in improving content quality and supporting journalists who claimed to go for months with intermittent pay. Media Managers and editors should work with philanthropy organizations or media development partners in designing a media development fund that can holistically support quality in-depth journalism and mitigate against the harsh economic environment and address honesty issues among grants recipients.

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## Appendix I: Interview Introductory Letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Benard Ogoi, a Master of Arts in Communication Studies student at the University of Nairobi. I am currently undertaking a research study entitled: *A critical analysis of the effects of story grants on media sustainability in Kenya*. The objective of the study is to examine the extent to which storytelling grants affect financial sustainability of media enterprises in Kenya. I have identified you as one of my key informants in this study and would like to request for an opportunity to speak with you as your views will contribute greatly to the quality of the study. Any information provided will be treated with utmost confidence and will be used exclusively for academic purposes. Where there will be a necessity to quote you on specific points raised, your consent will be hereby sought. If agreeable, the quotes will be made anonymous. Your participation in this evaluation is entirely voluntary and you reserve the right to respond to the questions to the extent of your willingness.

Your response is highly appreciated in advance.

Yours faithfully,



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Benard Ogoi,

0724629900

## **Appendix II: Interview Guide 1**

*Objective 1: What is the reasoning behind storytelling grants and mentorship for journalists in Kenya?*

1. Do you think story grants are essential for journalists today?
2. Which categories of stories do you often provide grants and mentorship support for and why?
3. Do you think storytelling grants and mentorship help enhance professionalism in media practice?
4. What motivates you to apply for storytelling grants support? (To grant recipients).

## **Appendix III: Interview Guide 2**

*Objective 2: What effects do story grants have on media quality content production in Kenya?*

1. How do you think grants have affected the quality storytelling and/or content?
2. How has the coaching/mentorship influenced framing of issues and editorial decision-making practices/processes?
3. What contributions have the grants and mentorship sessions made in promoting professional journalism in Kenya?
4. How can storytelling grants be tailor-made to respond appropriately to quality content demands today?
5. What benefits have you realized from receiving storytelling grants and mentorship?

## **Appendix IV: Interview Guide 3**

*Objective 3: How best can storytelling grants complement existing media financing models, specifically on content production costs?*

1. What do you think of the financial grants targeting individual journalists?
2. To what extent have storytelling grants to your journalists affected your content production costs?
3. To what extent do storytelling grants and mentorship contribute to the quality content outputs by your media enterprise?
4. To what extent has the content resulting from storytelling grants contributed to the financial sustainability of your media enterprise?
5. What can grant makers do to contribute to financial sustainability of media enterprises?

**Certificate of Fieldwork**



**Certificate of Corrections**

## **Declaration of Originality**

**Turnitin Certificate**