

chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND BUILDING A CASE FOR THE CENTRE

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Conclusion

From the ongoing debate, a significant challenge for the media is how to bridge the gap between communication training and practice, on one hand, and the advancement of African societies and communities, on the other. The preponderance of media organisations in the urban centres has resulted in the neglect of the rural populace and their needs. The prevailing media system will continue to drive most of media activities to the urban areas, thus efforts must be made towards the development of community media that does not necessarily have to be in the vernacular languages. Consequently, institutions need to focus on the training of correspondents and journalists who reside in areas outside the cities where almost all of the training on communication and media takes place. Distance learning becomes important in this context,

to offer an environment that is flexible to correspondents, within the demands of their work and social responsibilities. In addition, institutions need to address the issue of training in areas that are not traditionally viewed as journalistic. Areas such as Film, for example, offer untapped, but immense opportunities for growth and cultural development. Another such area is development communication and journalism.

With regard to training, it is clear that training the African journalist behind the 'desired approach' will necessitate a whole new perspective that would factor most (if not all) of the major problems that confront Africa today. Otherwise, the orientation and news perception of the journalists, will be characterized by what Abubakar 1978: 171), describes as "being well-informed of the international scene but ill-informed on the happenings in the country". The stories of Africa are often told in these international news outlets where the foreign correspondents lack real insight into the African problems, especially the cultural contextualization of many African conflicts. Proper capture and presentation of the African story internationally would definitely be better carried out by African journalists, well trained and grounded in African realities. This way, even the news-making phenomena such as wars, famines and politics would be professionally captured and presented, as opposed to the current practice where such events are poorly covered and mostly blown out of proportions. Commitment and responsibility must be manifest in the media's examination of issues such as conflict, development and politics, among others within the African context. This is the type of journalism defined as development journalism, whereby the journalist not only ensures such virtues as truth and objectivity but also is required to take responsibility into whatever issue he/she covers in the course of work.

It has also emerged that media practice in East Africa is generally improving as the media environment continues to improve. Although

the media as a sector is gradually becoming a powerful instrument for public information and education, the mass media in East Africa remains constrained by acute problems. This is a major setback to media practice that should ideally grant individuals and groups opportunities to communicate freely embracing self empowerment and self determination without their collective and individual destiny being determined by press and power barons, princes and merchants. This is a basic-rights' issue, and history has generously demonstrated that the defense of basic human rights cannot be entrusted to these players (Hamelink, 1994). It is thus important that East Africa takes initiative and mount pressure against those forces of the state and the market to change this disempowering media trend. For the African media to fully become part of the public sphere, it should be free, to a substantial degree, from political and economic constraints and pressures from the state and from organized and vested economic and other interests, (Mak'Ochieng, 1994:17). Some of the above pressures can easily be reduced when the media is owned by the state, political parties or by private capital. In the case of public/state ownership, the media should be organized and run in a way that greatly minimizes political interference. In the case of other modes of ownership, the media system should be organized so that most interested parties have access to at least some medium of public communication, particularly in the publicly recognized main medium.

This issue cannot be left merely to professionals, researchers or scholars nor are they the sole prerogative of those holding economic or political power. Rather, the issue must involve the public at large. This is the only way towards developing the ideal media policy described by Bardoel (1998: 105) when he argues for a "convergent communication policy" that supersedes sectional, partisan, commercial interests and embraces an integral approach that is citizen-centred. Such a policy has to consider democracy, freedom of expression, pluralism and citizen empowerment as the