

Government and industry-led initiatives to support the development of the media market in Kenya

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The paper explores a range of initiatives that have seen the media in Kenya working closely with the government to reform media law and policy. It focuses on reforms that have been implemented over the last decade and, in particular, on those which were aimed at improving media viability on the local market.

This period has seen a series of seismic changes in the media industry, including the exponential growth of digital media platforms; the disruption of the media business model triggered by growing competition for advertising revenue; and the current global recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Key issues addressed by the paper, therefore, include:

- The role of a **media coalition**, the Kenya Media Sector Working Group (KMSWG), in mobilising stakeholders across the media sector and shaping government policy. The KMSWG's achievements include supporting the successful passage of the Media Council Act, the Access to Information Act and the Data Protection Act among other pieces of media-related legislation.
- The **Government Advertising Agency (GAA)** which accounts for 40% of total advertising spend in Kenya. An estimated 30% of this spend goes to small media houses at the local level, compared to just 10% of private advertising contracts. However, there are concerns that preference is given to outlets which portray the government in a positive light.
- The proposal to establish a **Media Diversity Fund (MDF)** which would support public interest and independent journalism by providing direct subsidies to both public and private media. The author argues that the fund needs a robust legislative and structural framework to ensure full transparency. It should be supported by the media industry at all levels.
- **Media subsidies to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Following lobbying by the KMSWG and the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), Kenya's Parliament agreed to allocate direct subsidies to affected media on the condition that they agreed to publish or broadcast public health messages. In total, 70% of the funding was allocated to community media and professional associations.
- Efforts to revive the **public service broadcaster**, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), through direct funding from the GAA; restructuring and increased allocation from the exchequer; and cutting costs. These efforts have met with opposition from the commercial sector and are proceeding at a snail's pace.
- A discussion led by the Kenya Union of Journalists to make **Google and Facebook** pay for news and support local journalism. Stakeholders are currently exploring the possibility of introducing legislation that could mitigate the loss of advertising revenue for local media outlets. The author suggests that this engagement should take place at the national level.
- An initiative to explore **digital media start-ups** in order to stimulate media investment opportunities for platforms that serve young people. In the view of the author, this initiative should be supported through government subsidies and should include a focus on public interest content.
- The formation of the **Kenya Media Policy Guidelines Task Force** which works to develop new instruments aimed at reshaping the structure of the media system in Kenya. It also advises on legal reform and the development of new regulation tools to achieve agreed policy objectives. The Task Force's remit includes the creation of the Media Diversity Fund and support for media business in general.

The report finds that the most significant changes in Kenya's media landscape have taken place as a result of joint initiatives between media and government. The author argues that coalitions and sustained lobbying are imperative in those situations where the government is hesitant to enact policy recommendations.

While direct subsidies awarded by the government may pose challenges due to the logistics involved and the criteria applied for allocating the available funding, the GAA – which bases its decisions on market performance – offers an attractive and replicable model.

The author also notes the tendency to treat the telecommunication industry separately from the media sector. He contends that universal access to telecommunication services should be supported alongside efforts to promote media viability and sustainability.