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## **Rethinking Media Policy in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa: The Challenge of Community Media**

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This article draws on the challenges confronting community media in South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria to propose a 'rethink' in media policy conception and the political processes for policy-making. It suggests an 'ethical-political' policy model as best suited to the contribution of community media towards sophistication in media policy discourse in the twenty-first century. The article locates community media within the conceptual framework of 'alternative journalism' and the scholarly debates about 'shapers' of media policy decisions. The empirical data are drawn from oral interviews conducted between 2011 and 2014. The study concludes, firstly, that African governments and media regulators need to quickly redress the pressures on community media to improve their effectiveness as policy activists. Secondly, the challenge of community media to media policy requires a revision of the conceptual, social, and political frameworks for media policy-making along the 'ethical-political' logic to make them more integrative and sophisticated. And thirdly, the contribution of community media requires greater public and academic acknowledgement. These issues are considered from the sociological and philosophical perspectives and only in relation to community press and broadcasting media.

Keywords: Community media, alternative journalism, activism, rethinking, media policy, access, and Participation

It is a well-known fact that community media constitute alternative communication systems in favour of citizenship. In this regard, community media format is distinctively different from the elite, capitalist, or mainstream media. The potency of community media (especially broadcasting and print) to contribute towards empowerment and development, particularly at the grassroots, through reportage and the constitutions of critical and progressive discursive fora is also a given. But the interventionist capabilities of community media for media policy reforms have remained, perhaps, the un-regarded aspects of community media for years, particularly within the context of debates about the 'shapers' of media policy in Africa. The contribution of community media towards media policymaking therefore requires greater public and academic acknowledgement.

In view of the known 'emancipatory' and 'democratic' ideals of community media, it is the assumption of this chapter that community media practice does hold out hope in the

bid to strengthen the frameworks for greater access and participation in the socio-political processes for media policymaking particularly for Africans, as well as for bringing about transparency in the media policy legitimization processes. The only possible barrier, as traditionally established in media scholarship, is where these media channels, rather than work to give voice to the voiceless, unwittingly subscribe to undisciplined pursuit of commerce. Again, the contribution of community media could be further hampered if African governments and media regulators fail to quickly redress the pressures on community media to improve their effectiveness as policy activists.

Informed by this assumption, this paper sets out to examine how community media of Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa, in response to the various practice challenges confronting them, operate as policy activists to provide the theoretical and contextual perspectives for media regulators and policymakers to 'rethink' media policy and the socio-political frameworks for policy-making along the 'ethical-political' logic so as to make them more integrative and sophisticated for the twenty-first century.

Structurally, this article considers the conceptual framework for locating community media's interventionist capability; views community media as alternative practice; conceptualizes media policy from the perspectives of its social dynamics and political processes; highlights the practice pressures confronting community media in the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa; and provides alternative model for approaching media policy in response to those challenges and the need for sophistication in policy debates.

## Conceptual Framework

One of the communication scholars that have provided a valuable conceptual framework for articulating the policy activist potency of community media is David Sholle (1995). His groundbreaking study of alternative television in the United States argues convincingly about the need to recognize and increasingly promote the interventionist potency of community media in media policy-making. The author admits that this could be best achieved when the political value of community media is essentialized along the logic of a revised model of Habermasian (1962) 'public sphere' debate. Sholle's seminal essay, *Access through Activism: Extending the Ideas of Negt and Kluge to American Alternative Media Practices*, has continued to generate arguments about the causal relationship between community media and media policy-making, not only within the North American educational institutions, but also across the broader interdisciplinary fields of media planning and organization.

His ideas, which extend and revise Negt and Kluge's (1983) reconfiguration of Habermasian *bourgeois public sphere* in terms of *proletarian publics*, problematizes the democratic deficit that has remained the hallmark of State and commercially-controlled media and their approaches to media policymaking. Sholle admits that the essential link between community media activism and media policy reforms rests, fundamentally, on the emancipatory potency of community media and on the utopianism of media technology (especially radio and television) being transformed from a mechanism of commercial distribution into one of communication (p. 23).

His core argument is that, while alternative form of media remains incapable of bringing about some of the media utopia it sometimes espouses because of the small-scale nature of the practice and its conflicting allegiances (p.14), it nevertheless does provide valuable models in media democratization and for more robust interventions in media policymaking across nation-states. But to be able to significantly reshape the media-centric public spheres in favour of emancipation and citizenship, he contends that

community media would need to 'rethink' the nature of their audiences, how they can work to disrupt the strategies by which dominant media make meanings, re-conceptualize 'access' both in terms of technology and political impact, as well as how community media practice could move beyond mere information production that are centered on rational arguments to pro-active policy interventions that are grounded on affective historical experiences.

Though Sholle's perspective does not offer the whole truth about community media's potencies, his conceptual framework can be drawn upon to understand the values of the sociopolitical and mediatory dimensions of community media for reforms. It can also help (though indirectly) in the articulation of some of the known core qualities of community media that inform efficiency in media policy interventions, namely, *localism* (orientation towards local communities and private citizenship), *democratization* (small media as 'sites' of struggles for hegemony and legitimacy), *independence* (autonomy from the State and commerce), *accessibility* (open to all stakeholders in terms of technology and contents), *participation* (active in promoting partnerships, accountability, and a wide range of creativity), and *advocacy* (the ability to affect public opinion and collective actions for change). These and more are some of the qualities that distinguish community media from the elite or capitalist media and/or underline the dialogic relationship between the two media formats.

Furthermore, his ideas make it clear that any debates about the policy activist potency of community media in Africa will make a more logical sense if such debates are considered as corollary debates about the value of community media as alternative form of media practice. However, in considering community media vis-à-vis alternative journalism, at least from the point of view of this chapter, the emphasis is not on the 'individual' dimension of alternative journalism, but on the 'community' aspect of this journalistic practice (radio, television and community newspapers).

## **Community Media as Alternative Practice**

Over the years, much of the debates about community media in Africa have been handled from the perspective of development communication. This model and approach has tended to emphasize the value of community media in national development, without concomitant strong emphasis on their potency as policy activists to affect socio-political and conceptual changes in favour of participatory media organizations. However, a consideration of community media from the perspective of 'alternative journalism' could offer a broader and more logical conceptual framework for articulating how community media's political and social processes can (and do) assist participatory media policymaking and the legitimization of policy decisions across Africa.

Alternative journalism, regardless of the diversity of its existing models, may be viewed in terms of a decentralized, non-commercial, and small media practice, which primary objectives are 'communication empowerment' (access in terms of ownership, production, and distribution) and the 'contestation' of political deficits in journalistic practices (in terms of professionalization, mediation, capitalization, and institutionalization), through the adoption of alternative methods of production and distribution by ordinary citizens (Hamilton, 2000). For Chris Atton (2010), alternative journalism is simply an expression of the fact that what is centrally at stake in the journalistic practice is the politics of communication power and imbalances in the distributions of information within societies.

Seen from Atton's perspective, it is clear that alternative journalism (hence 'community media') functions and thrives in a competitive communication environment

with elite, capitalist or mainstream media and where, perhaps, capitalist media still remains the dominant format. However, it is an environment where both the elite and alternative formats remain distinctive on a number of points. The differentiating issues are well articulated by Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval (2015): On the one hand, capitalist media, which are mostly private or government owned, prioritize and affirm capitalism and domination rather than critique them; rejects activism in favour of collective ownership and organizations of the media; separate professional media producers from consumers of media contents; tend to marginalize activists, critical, and progressive voices; and advances ideological contents that affirms, rather than question, capitalists and official political objectives and/or prejudices against minorities.

Alternative media, on the other hand, supports information and communication processes that advance the empowerment of the minorities, collective working partnership, and development at the grassroots. It is a media format that prioritizes access and active participation of ordinary and marginalized citizens in the production and circulation of contents; the ownership, organization and control of media outfits by the citizens themselves; and diversification in contents and worldviews. Alternative media practice is more open to engage critical, activists and progressive voices; it provides a vision of an alternative society where domination is kept to the barest minimum; and does not separate contents producers from content consumers. As noted by Fuchs and Sandoval, “the media actors are themselves the consumers of their media contents” (2015: 166-168).

While all media formats and journalistic practices, as argued by Fuchs and Sandoval, could be regarded as ‘social’ (in terms of promoting social action and social relations) and useful for the organization of society through information dissemination and communication (p. 166), it is fundamentally the distinguishing qualities that specifically mark out the importance of alternative journalism (invariably community media) as the most valuable sites for policy activism in favour citizenship.

The relevance of alternative journalism to the understanding of the interventionist capabilities of community media in media policymaking may, therefore, be placed against the importance of this journalistic practice in promoting far-reaching communication and the spread of different information types across diversity of national and regional sociopolitical sectors. This understanding may be viewed from different perspectives: Firstly, it places the value of alternative media practice in media policymaking against its provision of a comparative conceptual framework for articulating the variations in the reality, ideology, and discourses of countercultural small-scale media productions. Secondly, the concept confirms not only the oppositional, but also the complementary nature of community media in their role of enabling ordinary citizens and local communities communicate and represent themselves from the perspective of their historical and socio-cultural experiences. Thirdly, the term takes notice of the horizontal and interactive value of community media, not only in reportage, but as platforms of opinion-formations and counter-hegemonic debates through which ordinary citizens can mobilize themselves, engage in the affairs of the State, challenge State policies, and bring their leaders to accountability (Dahlgren, 1991). Finally, the concept of alternative journalism is able to encompass the increasing international co-production dimension of community media, where there is now an interplay in terms of artistic visions and politics, funding, and distribution styles between local and transnational communities and activist organizations in the representations of global memories of injustices and in the empowerment of alternative voices to campaign for the universality of human rights (Okon, 2014).

## Conceptualizing Media Policy

Media policy, whether seen from the African context or otherwise, is fundamentally concerned with the rights of peoples to own and organize media systems and to communicate. Historically, however, media policy has been approached as a very broad and complex concept. It reflects a wide range of empowerment and public communication issues, ranging from the institutional and the structural, to the ethical and the political, as well as the socio-cultural and economic principles employed to organize media systems and institutions within national and transnational contexts. While the concept touches on the positive ideological concerns of normative theories of public communication (regulations, professional ethics, and media laws), it also examines the limitations of journalistic practices or how expressive popular cultures affect the life and rights of persons and social institutions (Baran & Davis, 2000).

A holistic understanding of its meaning therefore entails an appreciation of the 'dynamics' deployed to determine its conceptual and practice patterns. The methodological implication of this reality is that the conception of media policy now requires an understanding of the changing interconnections and interdependencies among technologies, disciplines, policy themes, and the power processes and institutions (formal and informal) that impinge on media policymaking on the local, national, regional and global levels (Raboy & Padovani, 2010). Because of its complex and expansive nature, media policy definition is therefore an area of continuing controversy.

Some of the areas of strong agreement, however, are that media policy is part and parcel of public policy; that it exists as a correlate of the word 'politics'; that it encapsulates issues relating to laws, ethics, censorship, and regulations of the media, as well as rules of effective public relationships; and that in defining it, a clear distinction and interrelationship must be made between the phrases 'media policy' and 'media policies' (Freedman, 2008), between 'external' and 'internal' institutional policy frameworks (Oosthuizen, 2001); between 'national' and 'global' policy models (Raboy & Padovani, 2010); and between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' media policy models (Okon, 2015).

Seen under these perspectives, media policy may, therefore, be approached as an umbrella word that provides the "window on broader questions of power or as a specific term meant to explain different policy formats of diverse media forms" or political regimes (Duff, 2010: 50).

## Methodology

The empirical data for this paper are drawn from oral interviews conducted between 2012 and 2014 in South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria. Data were aimed to establish the relationship between community media and media policymaking in the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 38 persons, purposively selected, were interviewed: 15 from South Africa; 14 from Ghana; and nine from Nigeria. The interviewees were drawn from a broad industrial sector, covering community media establishments, academics, media coalitions/foundations, media regulators, and mainstream media professionals with alternative visions. The selection was made to fit with the objective and the multimedia orientation of this study and to take notice of their geographical dispersions within national regions; it was not informed by any political or sociocultural expediency. Below are the findings.

Community Media in Africa as Policy Activists



Community media is now a familiar concept in Africa. With the deregulations of the 1990s, there is now a high growth in the number and diversity of community media across the Sub-Saharan African region. But over the years, much of the debates about 'shapers' of media policy decisions in Africa takes notice of the impacts of such factors as the changing directions in technology, political economy of communication, modernization and colonialism, international development initiatives, concerns for local political and cultural contexts, the dynamics of democratic politics and others. African scholars, in particular, have also placed emphasis on the importance of African ethical and traditional values (Okon, 2014). Community media has, however, been given inadequate attention in the discourse about 'drivers' of media policy developments. It is this neglected element that this work recognizes.

Historically, the presence of community media in Africa has grown out of a number of social dynamics, political processes, and power interplay across diverse political regimes, including the colonial regime. Their emergence is generally an expression of ordinary citizens' disillusionment and dissatisfaction with established African power politics, the mediation processes of mainstream media, and with the 'objectivity' ethics of professionalized media (McQuail, 1992). Generally, community media in Africa, as in elsewhere, pose 'emancipatory' and 'democratization' challenges to African governments and policymakers, particularly in the areas of policy ideologies, policy productions, and/or regulatory requirements. Thus, it is largely the absence of space for a progressive voice in mainstream or elite media that led to a search for alternatives by groups and local communities.

Research reveals that, by 2014, there were 470 community newspapers and magazines, 127 licensed community radios and four community televisions in South Africa. Obtaining a record of the precise number of community newspapers and magazines in Nigeria was difficult. But officers of the Press Council and Corporate Affairs Commission interviewed admitted that there were many community newspapers in Nigeria. For years, the state policy had prevented the licensing of 'grassroots' community broadcast media in Nigeria; rather it encouraged the proliferation of campus media for students. This restrictive policy was brought to an end only in May 2015 when 18 'grassroots' broadcast media were eventually licensed to serve specific communities within the six national geo-political zones. Ghana, around the same period, recorded a dearth of 'authentic' community newspapers and journalism. What existed was a high degree of *specialized* publications and papers that claimed to belong to the community sector but operated in sympathy to either the ruling political party or the opposition party. Their modes of operations were generally far removed from that of authentic community papers as conceptualized by Unesco. Evidence further indicated that 12 community radios, one community television, and quite a number of educational broadcast media were licensed to operators in Ghana; and that Ghana Community Media Initiatives were working to get 12 more grassroots radios on air (Okon, 2014).

Fundamentally, some of the elements that have made community media attractive to Africans over the years, among others, are their horizontal structures and power-leveling strategies, accessibility in terms of technology and contents, capacity-building potencies, and the provisions of voices to the voiceless in the African local communities. The notion of community media working to promote alternative values other than commerce (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010) or challenging the concentration of media power and the top-bottom pattern of communication that characterized most State-owned communication channels (Couldry, 1999) is also very much at home in Africa.

However, one compelling quality of community media that has received the least public mention in the continent is their policy activist potency. This quality is defined by community media's campaigning, mediatory and sociopolitical processes. In other words, four main 'platforms' now provide the means by which community media influence media policymaking in Africa: programming, capacity-building initiatives, horizontal and vertical linkages, and deliberative and social forums (Okon, 2015). The policy interventionist quality of community media, it is argued, is therefore one of the specific theoretical and practical locations for understanding and logically framing community media policy considerations and challenges, in terms of the required changes in the sociopolitical dynamics and the specifics of media policy conception and decisions.

## Community Media's Policy Challenges

Field findings further indicate that most of the policy concerns of community media in the Anglophone Sub-Sahara stem from the various pressures confronting the media establishments in recent times. Primary among them are pressures arising from lack of official recognition of community media for years, the direct control (or lack of direct control) of community media by the founding communities, licensing and frequency allocation procedures, the various official regulatory frameworks in relation to community media practices, the pressures arising from the encroachment of neoliberal culture and the non-availability of official funding support, the adoption of African ethical values to inform policymaking, the rapid growth in parallel social media platforms with inevitable impacts on the way citizens now access news, as well as the presence (or lack) of integrative and inclusive policy formation systems. However, only a few of these are considered in this study. The ultimate goal is to see how these challenges, over the years, have informed and shaped the need to 'rethink' media policy in line with the existing 'emancipatory', 'democratic', 'moral', and 'affective' logics of community media.

## Official Recognition by Governments

The campaigns to achieve official recognition had constituted the initial political force in the drive to establishing community media in most Anglophone African countries, especially community radio and television. This reality was attested to by most of the respondents in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Activism for recognition, apart from drawing supports from friends and allies in the mainstream media sector, did engender other alternative political *ad hoc* or permanent movements with shared objectives – such as trade unions, multicultural and linguistic movements, as well as the diversity of youths movements across various universities and tertiary institutions that acted in sympathy with the aspirations of community media coalitions and networks of the countries of study. Thus, the push for recognition expressed itself particularly in the demands for reviews in the official policies regulating community media and for the broadening of the discursive spaces for media policymaking to make it more inclusive and integrative.

For example, the campaigning activities of trade unions, multicultural foundations and of such bodies as the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) in South Africa, the Coalition for the Transparency of the Airwaves (COTA) and the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) both in Ghana, and the Nigerian Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) have, over the years, brought about various representations to their respective national Parliaments and Communication Ministries. The concerns of these bodies at their initial

representations were, fundamentally, tied around the need for official recognition and the broadening of policy discursive spaces to take notice of the valuable contributions of community media practitioners or would-be practitioners. The roles of the academic community and international agencies in the struggles for recognition were not overlooked by respondents.

Another dimension in the drive was attempts to introduce community media programming into mainstream media programme spaces in the different countries of study. These attempts came by way of negotiations with national broadcasters for 'natural windows'. The sole aim of the project was to raise consciousness in favour of community media and to prepare would-be community media practitioners towards eventual licensing of the broadcasting arm of community media by national governments. The 'natural window' project in South Africa, for example, was reported to have ended in a failure due to inefficient organization, logistical problems, and the loss of focus by some key members of OWN, the organizing body.

While empirical evidence indicates that a good numbers of Anglophone African countries (including Ghana and South Africa) have now put in place legislations that give recognition to community media (especially print and broadcasting), a few countries like Nigeria for years only provided legal recognition of the 'baby' arm of the community broadcasting sector, namely, campus broadcasting. Though the National Broadcasting Commission of Nigeria (NBC) since 2005 had offered in its Code modalities for the formal ownership and operation of community broadcasting media in the country, licensing the 'grassroots' arm of the community broadcasting sector to fall in line with the provisions of the Code remained problematic. It was generally seen as a security threat. Explanations made by the Commission over the years in relation to the licensing challenge, has always been a trade-off between the Commission's recognition of the national security instinct of the presidency and the demand of civil society organizations for the Commission to live up to its mandate by responding positively to applications for licensing and frequency allocations. This jinx was broken only in May 2015 when NBC eventually recommended and obtained permission to grant operational licenses to 18 development organizations spread across the six geopolitical zones in the country to run 'grassroots' community broadcasting channels. This latest development, in many ways, is a plus to the policy-related struggles by community media groups in the country.

## Licensing and Frequency Allocation Procedures

Concerns with licensing are fundamentally about the limitations imposed by broadcast regulators of the three countries on frequency allocations to community broadcast media, the opaque nature of the licensing process, and lack of independence of the regulators. The question of equitable frequency allocations, in line with the requirement of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is at the baseline of some of the policy proposal of community media. However, debates by respondents about frequency spaces for community broadcast media were more vocal within the community radio stations than it was within the community television establishments. Being the less common, most community television stations in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa operate through the frequency spaces provided for satellite networks. Some of the known exceptions are the Cape Town Community Television (CTCTV) and the Coastal TV, the only community television in Ghana.

Evidence further shows that each country draws on a distinctive licensing processing system. Nigeria, for example, currently adopts the North American 'bidding system' of

licensing. NBC, the body responsible for the licensing of broadcasting media in Nigeria, is however being criticized for its lack of independence from the executive arm of government. South Africa and Ghana, on their parts, adopt the 'discretionary system' of licensing operational in the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries. Some community media broadcasters and activists in South Africa are critical of the discretionary system that has found its way into the *Electronic Communications Act of 2005*. They maintain that the system is too "random and haphazard" to minimize media concentration. The situation is such that any applicant for broadcasting license could, if not responded to by ICASA within 60 days, presume he has obtained a valid operational license. Respondents maintain that "the random licensing process" does not provide for a level playing-field as it is the case in Nigeria. They are also critical of ICASA's ineffectiveness in monitoring the process and/or its 'closed' administrative approach that does not enable other stakeholders offer useful insights towards diligence.

In Ghana, the GCRN, a coalition of community media activists, is also concerned about the arbitrariness and patronage that is affecting the frequency allocation procedure in Ghana. They maintain that the frequency allocation process is highly opaque, enabling the "frequency mapping" made by the National Communication Authority (NCA) to be riddled with manipulations, ineffective monitoring, and language confusion, aimed to promote partisan political agendas against the common good of the people. As a result, those frequencies meant for community broadcasting media have hardly been used for that purpose. But most challenging is the inability of civil society organizations to convince NCA, formerly a security organization, to review its 'closed' administrative procedure. GCRN's core policy position, for example, is that NCA needs to operate a more transparent and integrative licensing system, provide regular licenses to meet the needs of community media initiatives, and clearly differentiate between authentic community radio and private commercial stations that are licensed to politicians as community radios.

Generally, the 'frequency scarcity' type of argument adopted by broadcast media regulators in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa has for decades remained the most familiar (and perhaps) outdated 'administrative' method of regulating broadcast media by the State. The purpose has always been to manage access to the airwaves in favour of State services and partisan political interests (Feintuck & Varney, 2006).

### Direct Control by the Founding Communities

Community media in Sub-Saharan Africa is very much conceived as citizen- and community-controlled means of communication. This conception is efficiently captured in a broad range of the practice regulatory systems made available by governments or their regulatory agencies, as well as in the African Charter for Broadcasting. But whether the communities where these media establishments are actually located and in whose names licenses were granted are enjoying this singular privilege remains contestable. At the heart of this controversy, of course, are the questions of media ownership and media power.

The question of structural organization of community radio to ensure participation by and accountability to the local community emerged strongly in Ghana and Nigeria. A few respondents admit that some of the community radio stations were originally licensed to a few powerful elites and political appointees. These individuals still exercise oversights and influence on how operational activities are organized within the establishments. Responding to this allegation, Lahweh of Radio Ada (Big Ada) admits that this was the reality at the early stages of community radio establishments in Ghana; but that the situation is now different. He confirms that most community radio stations in the country are now

firmly under the control of the founding communities and that their programming philosophies and orientations are also directly being shaped by the participating local communities. Thus, the imbalances and injustices earlier witnessed in terms of effective control of the stations have now been adequately addressed both by NCA and the Community Media Initiatives of Ghana.

Officials of NBC interviewed also admitted working to avoid the possible selective 'hijacking' of the right of ownership and power of programming when grassroots community broadcast media eventually takes off in Nigeria. The NBC officials also indicated that the Commission has already put in place some guiding rules to stem anxiety and discourage those who may be having such selective controlling plan in mind.

## Encroachment of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, as a supra liberal economic concept, entered into the African continent through governments' capital redistribution political projects and free market processes. The primary goal of neoliberalism is to create, through liberalization, privatization and marketization of media spaces, structures for mega economic growth and globalization. Neoliberal pressures remains the key features of today's media environments, shaping everything, from the role of the State in expanding media spaces, ensuring competition and limited media regulations, to the character of the media contents produced whereby contents are commodified, and to the way audiences are conceptualized as consumers (Freedman, 2008). Community media, though still providing spaces for alternative technologies and programming, are increasingly being impacted by the pressures exerted by the ever globally-expanding capitalist economy.

Comments from respondents from across the three African countries indicate that the challenge of neoliberalism in the Sub-Sahara is tied around the funding concerns of community media to ensure their survival, the promotion of inequitable advertisement opportunities for community vis-à-vis mainstream media, and the question of how some community media stations are increasingly being reoriented towards commerce.

A good number of community broadcast media stations in Africa, with the exception of South Africa, receive little funding support from government. As a result many of them now lean on diverse sources of income for survival - patronage, commercialization, and/or annual community contributions. But the presence of neoliberal tendencies in a sector generally conceived as non-commercial is becoming increasingly evident in the drive for excessive advertising, high-pricing of air-times (for broadcast media) and advertorial columns (for print media) in order to stay afloat.

The situation is becoming more pronounced among those community newspapers that align with multimedia establishments. Within the community radio sector in South Africa, for example, neoliberal tendencies are particularly evident among those community radio stations that do not receive subsidies from the Media Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA) and that are required to grow their distinctive means of survival. A good example, is Jozi (105.8) FM in Soweto (Gauteng Province). But in Nigeria neoliberal tendency was known to have grown particularly among some campus radio stations that were drawn into generating money for the Universities. A well-known, but now controlled, case is the Unilag (103.1) FM, Akoka-Lagos.

Thus, driven by concerns for bigger capital, a good number of community broadcast media in Africa are beginning to sound more like commercial stations. They are more interested in the products they are selling and in the charges they impose on services

rather than in the provision of credible information to educate their citizens. While majority now draw finances from 'mixed funding' arrangements, others rely heavily on 'commercial funding' models to sustain productions.

Some respondents blame this development on the inequitable management of limited national advertisement resources by government, the requirement for regular payments of royalties to government on services, the demands of proprietors for higher financial returns in the case of community newspapers, and the need to strengthen participatory programming and the training of staff members which are more capital intensive than even the acquisition of technologies. Others attribute the encroachment of neoliberalism to the poor economic condition of African countries, reduction in international supports, changes in audiences and how they access news, and the relatively lack of official funding mechanisms to support community media. South Africa that is known to have a relatively good official funding mechanism is, incidentally, also faced with challenges. The biggest mentioned by most respondents borders on delays in "contracting" for immediate disbursements of approved funds and on the culture of poor compliance of some community media with application procedures as stipulated by law. There were also complaints from Ghana regarding the recently announced Media Development Fund (MDF) by the Ghanaian government. Respondents noted that the proposed project still lacked an enabling modality to make the plan functional.

But, generally, the encroachment of neoliberalism is increasingly raising a moral question for a sector which core practice objective has been 'non-profit-making'. The moral question encapsulates an attempt to understand how over-reliance on 'commercial-funding' by some community media could unwittingly lead towards the 'dumping down' of news, with potential negative consequences for investigative practices, education of ordinary citizens to support public policy developments, and invariably for activism for social reforms.

Interviewees were generally in agreement that a 'mixed funding' model should be adopted to reshape community media practice against the encroaching neoliberal culture; that the distinctive national funding experiences of community media require further critical study; and that their funding proposals for the industry requires formal integration into the policy discourses and the administrative actions of the agencies responsible for the further developments of community media across the African region. Adrian Louw, the Programme Integrator of Bush Radio (Western Cape), for example, is of the view that because the intrusion of neoliberalism into community media in South Africa has now reached a crisis point, it requires that MDDA looks again critically at how community radio stations are funded; that all stakeholders have a rethink of how "we started as a community radio and why some stations now sound like really bad version of community radio, and that reviews should be made on how community broadcast media can best fit into a purely Western business model".

The credibility of the position of community media activists for a more inclusive policy reviews on funding could be further evaluated against the valid scholarly argument that adequate funding is potentially capable of bearing consequences (directly or indirectly) on the stability of the sector, growth in communication infrastructures at the grassroots, small-scale local programming, staff developments, and 'active' audience participation in community media.

### Adoption of African Ethical Values

The concerns with African ethics is about how African media policymakers can draw on communally acceptable moral, ethical, and cultural progressive principles to understand

how Africans can best manage and use their media outfits, overcome the developmental problems in their rural communities, as well as the problems arising from the negative impact of neoliberalism. This pressure area was, for example, reflected in the *Communiqué* of March 29, 2012 that emerged from the International Conference in Ibadan (Nigeria) organized by the NCRC and in a number of other *Communiqués* issued at the end of conferences and workshops held across the three countries in the last couple of years.

Participants in the Ibadan conference, for example, noted among other things that though it is important for community media across Africa to be evaluated in terms of availability of technologies and of their strong ties with interest politics and cultural developments, the normativity of community media will also require a broad-based recognition, effective articulation and utilization of positive African cultural, moral, and ethical values to inform policy, management, and programming. In particular, emphasis was placed on the need to reawaken and strengthen African communitarian value as a fundamental principle for the organization of media systems. They argue that the adoption of African ethical values could also go a long way to assist effective management of the dynamics of social changes evident across the African continent.

Kofi Lahweh, the Training Officer of Radio Ada (Big Ada, Ghana) also stressed the importance of African ethical and moral principles to the construction of meaningful media policy frameworks. Lahweh maintained, firstly, that it is community values and ideology that ought to inform community radio programming. Secondly, the inclusion of African traditional values in policy would help to minimize the negative impact of neoliberalism on media programmes that come often by way of alcohol and cigarette advertisements. It would also checkmate against how media now promote dysfunctional sexual behaviours, which are deeply against African positive moral sensitivity. Lahweh argued that throwing African positive traditional values overboard in the pursuits of relative rights and modernization would only, at the long run, work against human affectivity, a meaningful institutionalization of positive ethics, and effective media practice discipline in Africa.

The importance of including African ethics in media policy formulations could be evaluated against some of the essential qualities that ground African ethical and cultural principles and that have been highlighted by African moral philosophers, especially their affective, social, humanistic, and moral characteristics. While the *affective* character places the duty of love, empathy, and hospitality above all else, the *social* quality places emphasis on the importance of togetherness (as against individualism) and collective social responsibility, cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocal obligations. Also, while the *humanistic* quality transcends the moral needs of a particular African society and addresses issues that are of global importance, the *moral* quality places African ethical principles beyond religious prescriptions to the question of moral characters that have gained or failed to gain communal acceptance. It is these qualities (some of which are formulated as 'maxims' and 'proverbs') that fundamentally provide the parameters for a healthy relationship between the person and the community. They also constitute the integrative components wherein which African societies function. This integrative perspective can therefore offer a useful framework for strengthening the much lauded arguments for a 'de-westernization' of media-related debates in Africa (Curran & Park, 2000).

## **Rethinking Media Policy: Need for Sophistication**

Seen together, the various pressures confronting community media have already given rise to a number of new media policies across Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa. They have also constituted the need to 'rethink' and 'reconstitute' a number of other media policies in line with the visions of community media, so as to make them more sophisticated and more acceptable to a wide range of stakeholders. The adequacy of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1963) 'Four Theories of the Press' in addressing contemporary media policy needs has been put into questioning and found wanting, causing numerous media theorists and authors to critically reexamine their value for the twenty-first century (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

The general perception is that the Four Theories of the Press, which over the decades have provided conceptual modalities and the driving forces for media policymaking, crystalizes only the concerns of the 'end-driven' approach to policymaking. This approach was prevalent when newspapers served as the primary means of public communication and understands media regulation in terms of achievable ethical goals to be pursued by the profession and the social welfare State, such as the protection of State's interests or the prevention of harm to private citizens. Journalistic practice was expected to place strong emphasis on the principles of objectivity and good conscience. The approach, however, lacked sensitivity to issues of broader access, diversification of policy decision-making venues, as well as the importance of affective cultures.

Though the end-driven approach somewhat stood corrected by the 'administrative' approach that emerged with the beginning of electronic broadcasting and which central concern was a detached approach to media policymaking through the State's promulgation of legally enforceable rules to govern the media and control public communication initiatives, both the 'end-driven' and its complementary (or counter) 'administrative' model are now seen within scholarship as lacking the kind of sophistication that could adequately address issues of access, diversification, participation, transparency, and free market regimes that now sweep and affect contemporary media policy decisions (Freedman, 2008).

It is in this regard that the policy visions of community media, brought about by the wide range of practice pressures they continue to experience, could be drawn upon to address these deficits. Informed therefore by their thinking and aspirations, I wish to propose an 'ethical-political' approach to media policy configuration. This approach understands media policy, not only in terms of normative principles, but as the mechanisms (ethical, moral, political, economic, social and legal) through which expressive cultural activities and institutions are regulated and funded against the backdrop of the mundane and rational politics of bureaucratic and corporate life (Moran, 1996). The value of this conception is grounded in a broader view of the general determinants of State and corporate actions and how these affect the packaging of information "with alternative labels" (Duff, 2010: 49). This proposal is made in the belief that this approach is more in consonance with the yearnings of community media groups of the African region.

### **Ethical-Political Approach**

The 'ethical-political' approach is drawn from David Hutchison's (1999) conception of media policy as the interplay between 'politics' and 'ethics'. His idea is grounded on what he describes as "sceptical liberalism" (1999: 4); that is, a mitigated humanist and right-based theoretical framework that questions the 'neutrality' principles of professionalized media and seeks a balance among local community, private citizens, and government's



rights to determine legal truths. The ethical-political framework also draws resources from David Hume (2000 Reprint) and Immanuel Kant's (1985) respective recognition of the importance of 'affective' and 'critical rational' contents to the conception of the field of normative ethics. While the secondary resources for this approach are drawn from the 'end-driven' and the 'administrative' approaches that, respectively, puts emphasis on the specificities of social responsibility of the media and the role of the State as the key policy player, the primary resources are drawn from the 'venue-based' approach that recognizes the importance of diversifications of social actors, venues, and political impacts in media policymaking.

The requirement of the ethical-political vision is, fundamentally, the need to integrate the administrative technicality of governments, the objective policy vision of professionalized media, and the politicized interests of civil society groups (or the *affective* policy vision of community media). The new model recognizes the need to balance 'governmental politics' with 'actuality' and with 'normative ethics'. The three elements of the integrative media policy conception must, however, find their crystallization within the ideological and the narrative fields. But more than that the goal of the ethical-political approach is to appeal to policy makers and media professionals to continue to recognize the need to form a 'policy community' and 'policy networks' (Humphreys, 1994) that are capable of providing the necessary participatory platforms (formal and informal) for stakeholders to negotiate and draw on the multiple benefits of the diversity of policy approaches. Such an approach will enable the conception of the interests of governments and of the life context of disadvantaged cultural and ethnic groups, not just as possibilities but as rights and legitimate ends (Negt & Kluge, 1983).

The need for the formation of an inclusive policy community for the purpose of effective negotiations is also recognized by Robert White (1999). White argues that an effective process of media policy objective conception and negotiation in Sub-Saharan Africa should not be seen in terms of "trying to get more for one's constituency" (p. 491); but rather in terms of maximizing the potentials of the various policy actors, on the basis of the principles of contributive and distributive justice. For him, amidst the diversification of regulatory visions, media models and services, regulatory agencies should aim, above all, to "find ways of encouraging and supporting different groups and of bringing them together to discover mutual interests" (p. 481) and to constitute a community of care for one another. White maintains that a balanced national policy objective should aim, above all else, to institutionalize this integrative and empathetic objective in order to promote greater responsibility among all citizens.

In proposing an 'ethical-political' policy model, I am also conscious of the diversified nature of the field of *ethics* and of the increasing rejection of *ethical relativism* (individual and cultural) as a resource for moral certainty and for the redefinition of moral obligations geared towards the public good (Glissant, 1997). While the field of *ethics* in itself does not offer anyone a claim to a total certainty, it is important to note here that the value of the ethical-political approach does not rest on any weaknesses associated with *ethical relativism*. Rather it rests on the increasing lack of *affective* and *moral* contents in contemporary communication politics and in the persistent suppression of alternative voices by national governments or their regulatory agencies, through 'closed' policymaking mechanisms, opaque media licensing processes, and the strengthening of neoliberal administration.

The ethical-political vision can, therefore, provide a philosophical framework for understanding how journalism can remain socially responsible and for overcoming the problems associated with African governments' unilateral attempts to control media

systems without recourse to the valid positions of other policy actors, which account for the enduring presence of many bad media ethical qualities today. The approach is also valuable for connecting *alternative media policy vision* with *mainstream media policy model*. Mainstream model, on the one hand, has been constructed mostly in terms of bureaucratic versus clientelistic administration or liberalism versus neo-liberalism ideologies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Alternative vision which often finds expression through experimental media practices and citizenship social movements, on the other hand, has principally been framed in terms of the reformative versus subversive vision and the incorporation versus supplementary actions (Atton & Hamilton, 2008).

## Conclusion

Against the backdrop of growing scholarly debates in favour of sophistication and broader interventions in media policymaking, I have successfully indicated that community media of Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa is holding out a new and an integrative vision to media policymaking in the twenty-first century. The vision requires a review of the political and social frameworks for media policymaking. The core argument of community media activists is that, amidst the fast shifting national regulatory environments in Africa, their distinctive policy proposals (drawn out mostly from their practice challenges) should be integrated into formal policy positions of African governments, as issues bordering on human rights and on better service deliveries to local communities. The adoption of this integrative approach can serve to mitigate the tensions on community media and on citizenship. The contribution of community media into media policy debates in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa may therefore be broadly constructed in terms of the 'ethical-political' policy framework. The need for the 'ethical-political' orientation may, in concrete terms, be discernable in the call for the recognition of community media in all its practice dimensions and for successful integrative reviews (devoid of official self-serving agendas) of the funding experiences of community media as distinguishable from that of capitalist/elite media. The adoption of the policy approach could, for instance, help in effectively mitigating the impact of neoliberalism on community media, as well as enabling national governments respond to the everyday financial challenges of community media volunteers. Again, because of how the affective, humanistic and moral elements associated with the African ethical value systems are closely interwoven with African indigenous life world, the increasing demand of community media to adopt these ethical values is another illustration of the importance of the ethical-political policy orientation. The adoption of the approach can help bring sophistication into media policy in the twenty-first century, as well as provide another essential political framework for understanding why media policy should be articulated today, not merely in terms of official normative positive ethics or professionalized objectivity, but more so in terms of the concerns of citizenship. These issues, among others, may be seen to validate the value of the ethical-political policy objectives, as well as indicate some of the positive contributions of community media to contemporary media policy debates. However, the contributions of community media still deserve a broader public and academic recognition, and more so within the context of the debates about shapers of media policy decisions in Africa.

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