

Communication Policies in Civilian and Military Regimes: The Case of Ghana

by Audrey Gadzekpo

Abstract

This is a critical evaluation of the media legislation in Ghana since independence. It reveals the chequered government-press relationship that perpetuated a timid press in Ghana, but which is tending to thaw under the weight the new media legislations promulgated by the reformed President Jerry Rawlings' government.

The article gives an instructive glimpse into the press. It argues that the former president sought to use the media as a tool for propaganda and ideological indoctrination, which he wrongly believed was necessary not only for national and continental unity but also for Ghana's economic and political maturity.

The author argues that the Pan-Africanist president engineered the enactment of media laws that were aimed at entrenching his monopolist economic policies as well as his endeavour to establish political monotheism and strong anti-imperialist stand in Ghana. The inevitable result was a complete strangulation of the press, culminating in the state emerging as the sole player in the industry. Freedom of expression became inconsistent with his "consciencism", therefore, was utterly denied. Human rights was indeed treated with contempt by the CPP government, if the harsh legislations are to go by.

Surprisingly, the media in Ghana got their first states of pseudo-

freedom under a military junta, led by military strongman, Busia. This weak tolerance of press freedom and, by extension, civil liberties, was continued by Dr. Hulla Limann's government. The use of satellite dishes were allowed under this Third Reich for the time in Ghana.

That notwithstanding, both the regimes failed to decriminalize libel and repeal draconian sedition laws, that negatively impacted on media operations. The paper also points out that the state monopoly of the airwaves remained intact. Likewise, the paper argues, any perceived press liberties in Ghana were impaired and contradicted by legal decrees like the Provision of Rumours Decree, which criminalized broadcasting or printing of anything seen to be against the National Liberation Council, the Police or the Armed Forces. This, the author says, created a widespread 'culture of silence' among media practitioners.

The author recognizes the positive developments in the media industry by way of relatively friendly media bills, but, at the same time, regrets the lack of a clear policy to deal with the New Information World Order. He picks issues with the domination of the Ghanaian broadcast media by cheap, culturally imperialistic, alien programmes. The lackadaisical development of the rural press is lambasted while calling on the government to protect the poor's right to relevant information and their sources. The paper concludes by calling for the creation of a truly democratized legal infrastructure for the media to enable them to participate actively and fully in national development.

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Planification de la Communication dans les Régimes Civiles et Militaires: Le Cas du Ghana

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Résumé

La communication de Gadzekpo se consacre à une évaluation critique de la législation des médias depuis l'indépendance. On y montre la situation explosive, qui caractérisa le rapport entre la presse et l'Etat, avant l'arrivée du nouveau Président (Jerry Rawlings) au pouvoir.

Après un aperçu de la presse dans ce pays, l'auteur montre comment l'ancien président s'était servi des médias comme moyen de répandre la propagande et l'indoctrination idéologique. Celui-ci croyait, à tort d'ailleurs, que cela était nécessaire non seulement pour l'unité national/continental, mais aussi pour l'économie et le développement politique du pays.

L'argument de Gadzekpo est que l'ancien président, qui avait des tendances plutôt Pan-Africanistes, avait conçu et établi des lois sur les médias, qui cherchaient à soutenir ses propres idées sur les plans économiques, un monothéisme politique et un Etat anti-impérialiste. La conséquence inévitable fut la création d'une situation où l'Etat détenait le monopole de l'Industrie des Médias. La liberté de l'expression se heurtait contre ce qu'il appelait le "consciencisme". Les Droits de l'Homme furent violés avec impunité par le gouvernement CPP.

Ce qui est étonnant c'est que le Ghana figure parmi les premiers régimes militaires à disposer d'une espèce de pseudo-liberté, grâce aux efforts d'un homme Busia. Lorsque Dr. Hulla Limann prit le pouvoir, la situation ne s'était pas beaucoup améliorée, quoiqu'on autorisa l'utilisation des satellites paraboliques.

Les deux premiers régimes n'ont rien fait pour débarrasser le pays des lois de sédition draconiennes, qui gênaient les opérations des médias, donnant ainsi le monopole des médias à l'Etat. A cela s'ajoutaient les Décrets sur les Rumeurs, qui empêchaient la publication et la diffusion de toute information, contre le Conseil National de Littérature, la Police ou l'Armée. C'est cet état d'intimidation qui obligeait les praticiens des Médias de "garder le silence".

L'auteur de cette communication reconnaît une amélioration positive depuis la formulation de nouveaux projets de lois. Cependant, il regrette le manque d'une planification compréhensive, en accord avec le Nouvel Ordre Mondial. Gadzekpo s'oppose aussi à la domination des médias locaux par des programmes impérialistes et étrangers, qui ne font que marginaliser les médias dans les régions rurales. Pour conclure, cette communication préconise la création des infrastructures judiciaires qui soient véritablement démocratiques. Ainsi permettant aux médias de participer activement au développement national.

Introduction

No government can function efficiently without communicating with its citizens and administrative components (UNESCO, 1980). That there is a correlation between communication and development needs no emphasis. Communication experts like Wilbur Schramm have made the link between adequate flow of information and social change and development. Says Schramm:

"A new nation, at the time it decides for development, begins with a communication system which is somewhere between that of the tribe and that of modern civilisation...It can draw on resources that the tribe never could imagine —modern communications techniques already in use in many parts of the world" (1964).

Others like Kelly (1982) contend that "when a nation takes steps to improve its communication network, the changes touch every facet of life."

If communication is so indisputably integral to pursuing development policies of a nation, what role is it expected to play exactly? This can only be answered by looking at various communication policies adopted by the governments concerned. Defined as "a set of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems: (Dias et. al., 1979), communication policies differ from country to country. They are largely shaped by political ideologies, social and economic conditions as well as cultural values. Communication policies are, in sum, concerned with both the philosophical outlook of the roles of the media in a given society as well as the *modus operandi* in attaining these goals. (Kasoma, 1990).

Recognising the importance of mass media during the struggle for independence, many African nations co-opted the media in building their modern states. But, while freedom of expression and communication were deemed crucial to national development, African governments did not give information and communication the weight they deserved in development policies (Elmandjra, 1996).

Civilian Communication Policies

In Ghana, national communication policies over the years have been 'balkanised'. Both civilian and military Governments in Ghana have tended to articulate communication policy not through clear and cohesive national policy documents, but through public pronouncements and declarations by either the head of state, minister for information or senior Government functionaries; through the maintenance, enforcement or enactment of laws governing various aspects of communication; through sporadic decrees, e.g. newspaper licensing laws (especially under military rule); and during civilian rule, through Constitutional provisions.

Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was especially aware of the integral role that the media was to play in the development of black Africa's first independent government. Having used the press extensively in the struggle for independence, Nkrumah was all too aware of the power that the press could have in mobilising people. Thus he explained in a speech:

"It is part of our revolutionary credo that within the competitive system of capitalism, the press cannot function in accordance with a strict regard for the sacredness of the facts and that the press, therefore, should not remain in private hands" (1963).

On another occasion he again expanded on his media ideology remarking thus:

"The truly African press does not exist for the purpose of enriching its proprietors or entertaining its readers. It is an integral part of our society...must carry forward our revolutionary purpose. This is to establish a progressive political and economic system upon our continent that will free men from want and every form of injustice and enable them to work out their social and cultural destinies" (Ainslie, 1966).

Thus in the First Republic, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was set up with responsibility for all major government communication efforts, as well as a Publicity Secretariat to oversee all matters concerning government publicity. The Guinea Press was established and the *Evening News*, a CPP party paper founded by Nkrumah in 1948, was converted into the *Ghanaian Times*, a newspaper that served as the voice of the Government (a tradition maintained even today). *The Times* was expected to counter the influence of the *Daily Graphic*, a paper set up in 1950 and owned by the Mirror Group of London, but the latter eventually sold out to the Government, and in so doing further consolidated Nkrumah's hold on the Ghanaian media. While a few private newspapers such as the *Pioneer* existed, they were constantly harassed and censored.

In keeping with his vision of a united Africa that would fight the influence of imperialists forces, Nkrumah established the Ghana News Agency (GNA) in 1957. GNA was envisaged as the nucleus of a Pan-African news agency, and although that dream was never realised, GNA was considered an asset in the overall Pan-Africanist media strategy of the Government.

If Nkrumah regarded the print media as essential, he viewed the broadcast media as even more crucial. Nkrumah's Government sought to expand the accessibility of radio by setting up local radio (and later television) manufacturing companies, by expanding domestic broadcasting into six local languages and establishing an external service broadcast (1961) that reached across the continent. Under the Information Services Department, mobile information film vans were used extensively throughout the rural areas to propagate social and political messages to rural dwellers.

The control of communications in this era was reinforced with the promulgation of laws in keeping with these monopolistic policies, the anti-imperialist and pan-African policies of the CPP Government. A Criminal Code (Amendment) Act was passed requiring "newspapers and other publications which had been indulging in the systematic publication of matters calculated to

prejudice public order or safety" to be submitted for scrutiny before publication. The law, therefore, enabled local press censorship and censorship of imported publications considered contrary to public interest. In addition, a nine member committee was formed to inspect publication in bookshops, schools and libraries Act 76 (1961) was also passed to control cinematography exhibitions by previewing films. The False Reports and Sedition Acts were enhanced. Finally, a Newspaper Licensing Act was passed in 1963 requiring newspaper editors and publishers to obtain a license, renewable annually from the Government (Asante, 1996).

Luckily, the Nkrumah regime was not emulated by successive civilian governments. Indeed the civilian Government of the Second Republic (1969), which had succeeded the National Liberation Council (the military government that overthrew the Nkrumah government in 1966), was largely libertarian in its communication policies. Udofia (1982) describes this era as the freest in the history of Ghanaian media. Among other measures, the Busia Government repealed the Newspaper Licensing Act of 1963. In spite of this tolerance the government, nonetheless, fired the editor of the state-owned *Daily Graphic* over an editorial he had written which criticized the government's pro-apartheid stance (Asante, 1996).

The attitude of the Third Republican Government, of Dr. Hilla Limann (1979-81) was generally, similarly benign. The tone for media policy was set in the President's sessional address to Parliament on Nov. 30, 1979:

"The Constitution provides for the establishment of the Press Commission to manage the state-owned media and to give the press the necessary independence and protection to enable it to perform its [sic] essential functions of educating and keeping the public properly informed and serving as a watchdog of the people's rights and liberties" (Limann, 1979).

Led by the Constitution which forbade media controls such as newspaper licensing, policies guiding communication in this era

were considered "progressive". The Third Republic ushered in the use of satellite communications, an era that enabled Ghanaians to watch live the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana, and subsequently other live sporting events. Eventually, the more affluent bought satellite dishes for their homes thereby broadening the mass media options in the country. Unlike countries like Nigeria and China which took measures to curb the private use of satellite dishes, Ghana appeared not to have discouraged them.

But their libertarian media policies irrespective, neither the Busia nor Limann regimes repealed the draconian press laws on criminal libel and sedition. No attempts were made to either liberalise the airwaves, or open up the telecommunications industry to private investors and operators.

Military Communication Policies

In an attempt to restore civil liberties which Nkrumah had curtailed, the National Liberation Councils (NLC) sought to reverse many of Nkrumah's policies, including those regarding the media. The adoption of a free market economic policy in direct contradiction to Nkrumah's state-control policy meant that the rhetoric, as far as communication policies of the NLC were concerned, promised freedom from Government interference, though not necessarily Government control. The NLC lifted Nkrumah's censorship of outgoing messages and ban on foreign correspondents, and set up a publicity secretariat to advise the government on the formulation and execution of the regime's internal and external information and publicity policies. The role of the media was defined as "refraining from giving prominence to unimportant matters, cheap sensationalism and overdramatising of trivial events." The press was to "give constructive criticism." If it complied, it would be rewarded with absolute freedom from Governmental interference and removal of all restrictions. Under the NLC private newspapers, such as the critical *Legon Observer*, were established and allowed to operate freely.

In the area of broadcast, the NLC promulgated a decree establishing a "new Ghana Broadcasting Corporation" with the responsibility of undertaking "sound and commercial television," and providing "impartial and independent service and affording equal time to all political parties" (NLCD 226). To generate revenue, the Television Licensing Decree (October 1996) was passed, requiring consumers to obtain a license before installing a TV set in their homes. Dealers, hirers and repairers of TV sets were also required to obtain a dealer's license.

These relatively reasonable sounding policies, however, were contradicted by communication policies rooted in legal decrees and actions that smacked of interference. The Prohibition of Rumours Decree (NLCD 92) made it a crime to air any statement, even if true, that might cause disaffection against the NLC, the police or the armed forces. And two decrees were passed preventing anyone from taking legal action against the country, State-owned media and the State Publishing Corporation as well as the owners, publishers or editors of the State owned media for defamation without authorization from the Attorney-General (Asante, 1996). Following a publication criticizing the sale of some assets, some editors of state owned media were fired (Asante, 1996).

Still NLC Communication policies were more benign than the two other successive military regimes—the National Redemption Council (NRC) and its reorganized Supreme Military Councils I & II, and the People's National Defense Council (PNDC).

The National Redemption Council, which overthrew the Second Republic immediately upon coming into office, placed the Ministry of Information and the Publicity Secretariat directly under the control of the Chairman and Head of State, Col. I.K. Acheampong. The NRC promulgated the Defamation by Newspapers Decree (1972) and a decree similar to the Newspaper Licensing Act of Nkrumah was also passed, requiring all publishers, printers and circulators of newspapers, magazines or journals to obtain a license issued by the Ministry of Information.

In 1977, the military Government promulgated the Prohibition

of Rumours Decree stipulating that "any person who by print, writing, painting or word publishes or reproduces any statement, rumour or report which is false and likely to cause fear or alarm or despondence to the public peace or cause disaffection against the Supreme Military Council (a successor to the NRC) or the NRC among the public or members of the armed and police forces shall be guilty of an offense punishable upon conviction by imprisonment of not less than five years or more than ten years without the option of a fine" (Asante, 1996).

This was an era that sought to suppress the private press despite public pronouncements to the contrary. The regime established a committee (Essah Committee) to look into the grievances of striking journalists. The Committee's recommendations established important policy guidelines for Government press relations, recommending among other things, that before a dismissal or transfer, a journalist ought to be given the opportunity to state his/her case, and that a Press Council be established to mediate disputes between Government and journalists. Had the Government adopted these policy guidelines, journalists would have been partially insulated from governmental interference and a new relationship between Government and journalists would have been established. Unfortunately, however, these recommendations were ignored.

In the area of telecommunications, the NRC regime passed the Telecommunications (Frequency Registration and Control) Decree, 1977 (SMCD 71) thus establishing the Frequency Registration and Control Board. The functions of the FRCB were to allocate and control the use of radio frequencies and to approve and issue licenses to commercial and amateur radio operators, among other things. As in the case of the previous civilian regimes, however, no private broadcast licenses were ever granted.

The last military regime in Ghana of Flt. Lt. Jerry J. Rawlings, who staged a military coup in 1981, was characterized by policies that were essentially intolerant of the press and individual freedoms. The Press Commission established during the civilian

government of Dr. Hilla Limann —whom he overthrew— was abolished and instead an advisory council set up to advise the Minister for Information. Foreign music was described as cultural imperialism and thus banned from the airwaves, illegal video operations were banned and video operators were required to submit their films to the Ministry of Information for censorship. A regulatory body, the Cinematography Exhibition Board of Control, was set up and empowered by Nkrumah's Act 76 of 1961 to preview films. In addition, a law on defamation was passed in 1984.

A clue to PNDC government's communication policies can be determined from a speech given by the then Minister for Information, Joyce Aryee:

"I do not see the press as laying outside of the political institutions that we have. This is where I see that people ought to realise the role of the media differs from country to country. In a situation like ours when we need to conscientise people and where we have an illiteracy problem, you use institutions like the media to do the conscientisation" (African Contemporary Report, 1983-84).

The conscientisation effort meant that private newspapers were randomly banned for "distorting news" and "fabricating stories" and also for being unpatriotic and unsupportive of the ideals of the 31st December Revolution (Asante, 1996).

The final overt policy act that sought to silence the media during this period was the passing of the Newspaper Licensing Law (PNDC Law 211) in 1989 that revoked the registration of all newspapers and magazines published in the country and required that publishers re-apply to the Ministry of Information for registration. And to further reinforce Government's repressive communication policies, journalists and Government critics were systematically imprisoned and intimidated. The PNDC's communication policies thus bred and encouraged what became known as the "culture of silence."

Towards a More Progressive Policy

This "culture of silence" was eventually shattered when the winds of democracy which were sweeping the entire continent, coupled with rapid developments in information technology, began to chart a new course for the communication industry in Ghana. In this democratic dispensation of the 1990s, no longer was it acceptable to subjugate freedom of expression. Thus the first overt policy change of the PNDC was the repeal of the Newspaper Licensing Law in 1991. The repeal opened the floodgates for an unfettered press in the country. As in previous civilian regimes, freedom of the press was guaranteed by a Constitution that sought to loosen Government's grip on the mass media.

Communication policy in Ghana today is, therefore, guided by article 12 of the Constitution which stipulates the freedom of the media, and which seeks to insulate the State-owned media from governmental interference. These freedoms are also backed by article 21, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression for all as well as freedom of information. The freedom of information stipulation, however, appears to contradict instruments such as the Official Secrets Oath, which prevent public officials from divulging information to journalists.

Article 12 of the Constitution provides more than just assurances of press freedom however. It also provides guidelines for responsible journalism by stipulating a right to rejoinders and by establishing a National Media Commission. The NMC is charged with insulating state-media from Governmental interference, ensuring high journalistic standards and arbitrating grievances relating to the media.

Still, Ghana's Constitutional policies sometimes appear at odds with the government's latent policies which appear to be a hangover from the PNDC days. After a contentious battle over the powers of the Media Commission and when the term of office of the first Commission should end, the NMC was dissolved late last year. Instead of immediately being replaced, the Government

seems disinterested in swearing in a new Media Commission. Critics have also accused the Government of using legal means to cow the media. While these charges are denied, it is notable that there were more than 73 court cases pending against the media in 1996, most of them brought by Government or its functionaries (Media Commission Memo).

In spite of this, Rawlings' civilian government has perhaps ushered in some of the most liberal policies as far as the media is concerned. And while these policies are intermittently contradicted by the rigid enforcement of press laws, including criminal libel and sedition, the communication atmosphere is one that is nonetheless freer than it's ever been. In addition to the proliferation of newspapers, there are now several private broadcast stations. The liberalisation of the airwaves, a major policy departure from past governments, was no doubt helped by the Constitutional provision stating that there should be no impediments put in the way of the media, either broadcast or print (article 12), and by the general economic policy of privatisation adopted by the government as part of Ghana's structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes. Since July 1995, the Ghana Frequency Registration and Control Board has granted frequencies to operate broadcasting services to three free-on-air commercially supported UHF TV networks (none has as yet gone on air), 13 pay-per-view wireless cable re-broadcast service (MMDS) stations, four pay-per-view satellite (cable) re-broadcast service stations and 10 VHF-FM radio stations.

The liberalisation of the airwaves were part of the recommendations of the National Seminar on communication and information policy, held in July 1992. It was an important breakthrough for the development of new communication policies in Ghana. The seminar, organised by the Ministries of Information and Transport and Communication, brought together high level policy makers, communication practitioners and communication scholars who were charged with formulating "a dynamic and comprehensive communication and information policy for Ghana"

(Report of the National Seminar on Communication and Information Policy, 1992). Key among their recommendations was the setting up of a National Communications Commission, a multi-disciplinary body responsible to Government for the development and regulation of telecommunication and broadcasting network and services. This Commission would advise the Government on policy formulation in the following areas:

1. Regulatory guidelines for procurement, installation, management and maintenance of communication equipment.
2. Radio frequency management.
3. Protection of personal data on computers.
4. Standards of telecommunication.
5. Financing.
6. Tariff determination.
7. Human resource development.
8. Coordination of projects, in the communication industry.
9. Communication training institutions.
10. Licensing.

This recommendation has been fulfilled with the promulgation of the National Communications Authority Act on December 30, 1996, establishing the National Communications Authority. The Authority will "regulate communications by wire, cable, radio, television, satellite and similar means of technology for the orderly development and operation of efficient communications services in Ghana and to provide for related purposes." Among its duties will be the allocation and regulation of frequencies, the promotion of research and development of technologies, the promotion of fair competition among communication providers, the ensuring of efficiency among communication providers and consumer satisfaction, the establishment of a national numbering plan and the assignment of numbers accordingly, among other things.

Other important recommendations of the seminar were the separation of Post and Telecommunications; the development of telecommunications facilities to remote areas; the provision of coin and card-operated telephones and the opening up of the sector to private investors. This has also been largely followed. Post and Telecommunications are now different entities and strategic investors are being sought to privatise Ghana Telecom. Telephone booths have sprang up in big cities and the telephone infrastructure is generally being expanded to cover the country. This is especially important considering that Ghana's telephone density is among the lowest in Africa (Seminar Report, 1992). The expansion of the telephone network will make more meaningful the recommendations that seek to exploit information technologies such as the internet and the setting up of information libraries and databanks for media use.

The seminar also recommended a policy of privatisation of state-owned newspapers, though not state-owned broadcast or the Ghana News Agency Service (GNA). Human resources in the media and in telecommunications were also to be developed to cope with the growth and importance of the communication industry. Again, it appears that these recommendations are now Government policy, and GBC and GNA are still being supported and subvented, while plans are underway to float shares of the state-owned Graphic and Times corporations.

Aside from the seminar document whose proposals have been largely adopted by government, policy direction in the area of broadcast has been charted by a Preparatory Committee on Independent Broadcast set up on January 16, 1995 whose terms of reference were to "draft a well-defined set of regulations and guidelines for private broadcasting in Ghana" (Report of Regulatory Committee on Independent Broadcasting, 1995). Although that Committee's guidelines have not been adopted formerly, the chairman of the Frequency Registration and Control Board, expects most of their recommendations to be formalized into a broadcast code.

Among the more fundamental of the Committee's

recommendations are that frequency authorisation should be granted to a Ghanaian or to a Ghanaian-registered company with not more than 30 percent of the capital stock owned by aliens. Political parties, district assemblies and religious bodies were not to be allowed to own stations although they can buy air time. They also recommended a policy of discouraging cross media ownership and a preference for "localism" in the authorisation of the use of frequencies.

In the area of programming, the Committee suggested that violence, crime, bad language and incitement to ethnic, religious, or sectional hatred, and disaffection be avoided in programmes. And that "a percentage of programming should be Ghanaian in content but negative ethnic bias should be avoided."

Committee reports aside, perhaps one of the more important policy decisions taken recently, is the setting up of the Ministry of Communication to replace the Ministry of Information. The rationale behind the setting up of the Ministry was to bring telecommunications and information under one umbrella, rather than the traditional split that lumped telecommunications with transportation.

According to the out-going Minister for Information, the Ministry of Communication will "develop strategies and programmes and will take necessary initiatives for the creation of the enabling environment needed to build the appropriate national information and communication structures." The Ministry is expected to develop national policies aimed at advancing all sectors of communication and their application to national objectives.

A paper prepared by the Minister for Information setting out the NDC Government's policies in communication is instructive of the direction in which the Government hopes to take communication. Central to the policy, is the use of mass media for "social change, economic growth and cultural preservation and development", and the "deregulation, decentralisation and democratisation of the media." The Minister envisions decentralising media, particularly broadcast media, by

encouraging community radio stations to be set up by district assemblies, although one must point out the conflict between that vision and that of the Committee on Independent Broadcast that discourages district assemblies from acquiring radio stations. A degree of decentralisation is already occurring with GBC setting up FM stations in regional capitals of the nation. Eight out of ten such stations have already been set up.

In the area of information technology, there is a recognition of convergence of technologies. The NDC Government says its policy is towards developing Internet facilities by encouraging networks established by private sector and expressing the vague hope that rural population will eventually be involved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As lofty and progressive as these policy goals outlined for the future of communication in Ghana sound, there appears to be some serious gaps that need to be addressed. One such loophole can be found in the policy aimed at "democratising the media by bridging the communication gap between the rural and the urban populations. While envisioning the need to widen the options and availability of the media, no policies have been laid down to actually encourage this. There are no community or rural newspapers in the country and, indeed, all the committees have been silent on this issue.

More importantly, there is no policy that speaks the language problem in our country, a problem that is continent wide. English still dominates the broadcast media in a country with a 60 percent illiteracy rate. While GBC has a local language station that broadcasts in the major Ghanaian languages, there is no such provision for TV, a media which is fast penetrating our rural areas. And while there are a few local language programmes, they constitute a small percentage of total programming on TV.

Cheap movies and old American re-runs continue to dominate our television airwaves. Major programmes such as news are still only read in English and CNN, which GBC rebroadcasts at

certain times of the day, is the nation's main source of foreign news. And even as Africans argue about unequal information flow from the West, no serious attempts are being made to redress the problem. GBC is yet to reactivate its foreign service radio, which was first set up by Nkrumah, and the GNA has closed down all its foreign bureaus for lack of money. While Ghana subscribes and pays dues to PANA, news from the African news agency is only marginally used. Ghana's communication policies are also silent on efforts at setting up regional satellite stations. In short, no policies have been outlined to address the new information world order.

When it comes to private broadcast, no policy guidelines encourage private stations to "democratise" for the sake of rural or illiterate people, and because there are no guidelines, the formats of most of the stations are very western oriented, with hardly any use of the local languages.

The Committee on Independent Broadcast recommended giving priority to operators of local/community radio. Unfortunately, there are few takers as rural areas with little advertising base are hardly attractive to private investors. A few—but they are hardly enough—community stations are being planned by individuals with donor. This leaves the burden of community broadcasting to the people themselves. If, as recommended, district assemblies are not allowed to operate broadcast stations, alternatives must be found to help communities set up and run their own stations.

Media pluralism and the proliferation of other forms of communication might be the vision of both the framers of the constitution and government, but the capital to translate this into reality, especially in the disadvantaged areas where there is little incentive for private individuals, may mar this vision. It may be prudent that in tangent with the vision of inexpensive and readily available flow of information, certain economic measures such as tax breaks or reduced taxes on communication inputs be implemented. Currently customs duties and taxes on communication inputs and gadgets—from newsprint and paper,

to personal computers, faxes, telephone handsets and radio sets—are high, even for personal use. While Nkrumah's policy of local manufacturing of communication hardware followed his policy on improving communication in the country, no such policy seems to be in place today.

Finally, a liberal communication and information environment calls for legal reforms. Archaic and draconian laws such as sedition, criminal libel and contempt, which carry long jail sentences for what are civil, rather than criminal, appear incompatible with a democratised communication era. If communication is to be truly "democratised," policy to encourage access to free flow of information which currently constrains journalists and ordinary people seeking information with which to do their work, must be put in place. As noted earlier, legislation such as Official Secrets Oath, which public servants evoke, make it difficult to have a well informed public. As Kasoma (1992) argues, "the freedom of acquiring, disseminating and receiving information in any one country mainly depends on conscious decisions and the implementation of these decisions by government at national level. Most of these decisions come in the forms of media laws".

In order that the impact of Ghana's new communication policies are fully realised, it is important to take a holistic, rather than a sectarian approach. This means harmonizing and integrating all communication policies —national, sectoral, professional, institutional and legal.

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