POLICY BRIEF

Aim, topical focus and key results

The aim of this research project has been to explore the role civil society driven media and communication platforms and technologies in enhancing participatory governance processes in East Africa. The research focus has been on youth marginalized women in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Through the implementation of 6 subprojects, 3 in Kenya and 3 in Tanzania, ***media-articulated citizen engagement*** has been studied in a variety of ways. By combining comprehensive survey data, policy analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, the dynamics of media and communication practices - both production, consumption and use - were explored in relation to broader concepts of participation and empowerment. While the thematic focus in Tanzania mostly was on participation and empowerment in relation to adolescent sexual and reproductive health, the focus in Kenya was generally on processes of participation and empowerment in development, exploring uses of digital media and mass media in relation both to social interaction, business development, access and use of services, and in processes of public deliberation.

The sub-projects altogether point to the large impact that both digital media, mass media, and their interplay, are having upon both economic activity, health, education and governance processes. This has been documented by unpacking the ways ICTs, media and communication are used amongst some of the most marginal groups in society. It has also been documented by analyzing how civil society is changing, developing a variety of creative solutions through crowdsourcing mechanisms, to engage large and growing groups of citizens in civic education processes, and in tackling everyday development challenges. *This project has thus demonstrated that future development policies, and specifically policies in the sectors of public health and governance, cannot be enhanced without considering the new social and economic dynamics that the mediatization of society is resulting in.*

Let us give two examples from the empirical findings:

Firstly, in low in-come areas of Dar es Salaam both male and female youth are using media platforms in their struggle to do away with long-held traditionally defined masculine hierarchies and feminine subordination. They are using media platforms to air their views indicating expression of adolescent sexual empowerment. It was also found that youth's media uses and consumption can benefit from being guided, seen in the practices of the specific NGO that was studied (Femina HIP), indicating the continued need for media literacy programs.

Secondly, in the case of Nairobi, it was for example found that the rapid spread of mobile telephone has been an opportunity for many low income women for increased engagement in society. Women are using mobile phones for a variety of relevant everyday activities, ranging from sending money, paying bills, buying goods, and developing new business models on one hand, to interact with friends, maintain and strengthen social ties across large geographical distances on the other.

The complexity of mediated citizen engagement has been unpacked, as has many of the facets of how media and communication practices influence everyday development practices in the growing urban centers of East Africa.

Connecting background relevance to key foci and insights of the project

This project has developed in East Africa in a period of time where the development process – politically, economically and in terms of media development – has been extraordinarily dynamic. One of the major challenges in the democratic development process and the economic growth in the region has been to secure inclusive development processes, where all groups of society are participants in the development process and can experience they feel included, have a say in decisions influencing themselves, and that they see a way forward in their individual and collective development. One of the vulnerable groups identified was from the outset the youth, particularly the young marginalized women. They often constitute a group remaining excluded from public debate, economic development and decision-making processes. Thus, they became the focus of this project.

Issues of ***poverty alleviation***, ***social inclusion*** and ***good governance*** were key contexts to embed this project in. They are fundamental development challenges in Africa today and they are central in the poverty reduction strategy papers which many African countries have developed, including Tanzania and Kenya. In both their poverty reduction strategy papers, good governance and accountability, as well as the improvement of quality of life and social well-being has been expressed as explicit development objectives (IMF 2005, PRSP/Country Reports Kenya and Tanzania). It is in the context of this roughly outlined development process in East Africa and in response to these national development concerns in Kenya and Tanzania that this project emerged.

One of the growing concerns in development debates has been the ways and means whereby governments maintain transparency in the policy development and –implementation, and issues of how they are held accountable to their constituencies, the citizens of their countries. The role of civil society and the media in improving processes of good governance has been growing throughout Africa. This is also seen in East Africa. The period we have studied (2009-2015) has brought forward Kenya as one of the global pioneers in using civil society driven media and communication platforms for citizen engagement purposes and for holding decision-makers accountable. Crowd-sourcing mechanisms have been developed and used for a variety of transparency and accountability related purposes, ranging from electoral monitoring and political

devolution processes to the monitoring of human rights and enhancing participatory budgeting processes. These processes have been studied in our project, a typology of ICT for social accountability has been developed and theories exploring relations between communication practices, citizen action and social change have been developed.

Results and recommendations:

This project has been highly innovative in a series of ways, producing results at several levels, both in actual empirical results, in the research design, and in the strong dissemination strategy and policy dialogue. Key findings and recommendations include:

1. **Marginalized women and ICT**

Many new and innovative insights and ideas have emerged from the project fieldwork. Knowledge about contemporary media practices and use of communication has been generated, documenting how media and communication influences both everyday social interaction, access to services, business development and degrees and forms of citizen engagement amongst young marginalized women. The empirical studies have for example revealed that the uptake of ICTs has been smooth and rather quick, and that the use of digital media in articulating citizen engagement is highly feasible, contains potential, but is also a very vulnerable and quite unsustainable process if digital media as a means of engagement stand alone.

The study revealed that although there is a significant number of women using ICT for socio-economic and political development, women are still to fully utilize the benefits of ICT. They have limited use of ICT in the crucial civic engagement areas such as contacting leaders charged with responsibility of service delivery, accessing information on budget(s) and development plans. These are key institutions which determine who gets what, when and how, and unless women are able to effectively use ICT to participate in the political process of development planning and budget making, their special needs and that of their households are likely to be compromised.

Recommendation: There is a need for policy intervention, in particular in respect to availability of infrastructure, equipment, ICT applications and related training.

2. **Sexual and reproductive health**

The study in Tanzania found that several partners are involved in educating youth on how best to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health as well as identifying the burning issues that affect youth so they can be debated and addressed in diverse platforms. The study revealed several ways in which both male and female youth engage with the digital and mass media (at home, in the recreational places, at school and in public places) and how this engagement impacted on their adolescent sexual and reproductive health. The results showed

that both male and female youth feel free to hold open dialogue with the opposite sex partners and are ready to seek sexual health services. They attribute their empowerment to their access and use of both civil society-driven media and mainstream media.

Recommendation: Youth are already empowered to seeking and using sexual health services. However, youth believe that the service centres are not friendly at the moment. This is important for policy makers to see how sexual and reproductive health services for youth can be made friendly.

The study further described the contextual and social conditions that affect youth access and use of mass media and how these two impact on their sexual health. The findings revealed that through engagement with media, both male and female youth are struggling to do away with long-held traditionally defined masculine hierarchies and feminine subordination. Youth are using media platforms to air their views indicating expression of adolescent sexual empowerment. This is an important message for policy makers and intervention programs that the ongoing programs that are seeking to promote adolescent sexual health are working. What is required is to support such programs.

Recommendation: Both quantitative and ethnographic studies conducted in this project came to the same conclusion that youth media consumption and use need to be guided, thereby indicating the need for media literacy programs, which have to be guided by the policy.

3. **Research design**:

The qualitative and ethnographic approach to understanding the impact of recent media development upon contemporary development processes has proven an innovative approach contributing important and grounded knowledge to relevant development research and practice.

Recommendation: Further in-depth ethnographic studies are required, not just in East Africa, but in many of Danida's areas of interest where similar process of 'mediatization' are taking place. This relates both to urban centres, but also to rural areas, and their interrelation. New development dynamics are embedded exactly in these changing media and communication developments. They are influencing social, economic and political change, but are far from comprehended deeply enough.

Recommendation: An emerging area of interest where this would be of particular relevance relates to refugees and IDPs, their livelihoods in camps and areas of conflict, how business develops, money flows, social relations are upheld and new diasporic spheres are developed.

Conclusion:

The scientific production, dissemination and policy dialogue in this project has been intense and the outcome significant: It includes *6 articles* in peer reviewed journals; *26 book chapters* mainly in books published with recognized international publishers; *two PhD dissertations* conducting ethnographic field research amongst youth marginalized women; *a co-edited book* on the issues of how youth in Sub-saharan Africa get a voice and speak up in issues of relevance to their livelihood; *an edited special issue of the international journal 'Ethnography'* focusing on 'civic mediations'; *a co-edited book* gathering leading international scholars around issues of media, communication and social change; *two full book manuscripts* – the first offering a review of the field of communication for development, its history and development, and the second offering a theoretical contribution to rethink the field of communication for development from a 'citizen perspective'.

Additionally, there have been *37 conference presentations*, 33 of them at international conferences. Finally, and maybe most important in the context of development practice, has been the *involvement of the researchers in a whole range of new research projects* in the region and abroad;, collaboration with development practitioners within civil society (IBIS, ADRA, Ghana Venskabsgrupperne, FORDI), UN-agencies (UNICEF, Social Media Week in UN-City); new project applications; advisory board participation in similar projects and numerous invitation to come and speak amongst development practitioners.

As stated in the overall final report, the changing mediascape in Sub-saharan African is a moving target researchwise, and our MEDIeA project has managed to capture some of the current changes on the ground in terms of changing media and communication environments, their influence upon citizen's social interaction, business development and engagement in processes of public deliberation. Likewise, we have captured the changing conditions for the work of civil society given the opportunities of particularly the digital media.

Conclusively, the MEDIeA project has been one of the first international research projects of this size and scope, and with such a large degree of grounded empirical work uncovering the changing social dynamics and media practices that will determine a lot of development work in Sub-saharan Africa in the future.