

## Chapter 1. The Kenyan Context for Policy Information



### ***Political Environment***

As this report went to print, Kenya's political situation remained in a transitional phase roughly two years after civil tensions boiled over in response to contested election results released in late 2007. Relative calm was restored in April 2008 when a coalition government was formed between Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) and the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) led by Raila Odinga. Under a power-sharing deal mediated by the African Union, the president (Kibaki) retained most of the power as chief of state and head of government, while the prime minister (Odinga) led parliament and has some executive powers. The agreement also created commissions to review the country's electoral framework and investigate violence and injustices committed since independence.

Bickering between the coalition partners persisted over political appointments and the drafting of a new constitution. Complicating the discussion was the deterioration of Kenya's humanitarian situation as drought, food shortages and high commodity prices deepened food and livelihood insecurity, placing other urgent priorities on the political agenda.<sup>1</sup> (Indeed, the combination of political tension and humanitarian pressures created a challenging environment for conducting the research for this report during the second half of 2009; many senior policymakers were either too busy to meet or reluctant to conduct interviews regarding any aspect of their policy work)

## ***Development Priorities***

Kenya receives more than 1 billion dollars annually in official development assistance; the total in 2007, the latest year for which data are publicly available, was \$1.275 billion, or around 15 percent of government expenditures.<sup>ii</sup> Even so, money for development work is modest in comparison to the country's needs, and Kenya's development policy actors face difficult choices when they set priorities for spending and investments.

It is therefore critical that policy actors have access to information that can help them make informed and effective decisions. This report focuses on the extent to which policy actors have access such information, and what they need to access it more readily.

The Kenyan development context has become more challenging in the past couple of years. The post-election crisis of early 2008 and the global financial crisis conspired to end a relatively healthy period of economic activity; growth in per capita gross domestic product downshifted to just 2 percent in 2008 from 7 percent in 2007.<sup>iii</sup>

This has threatened Kenya's commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals—notably, that of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Kenya is also losing ground in its campaigns to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and enhance gender equality. In the last years for which data are available (2005-2007), the World Bank estimated that:<sup>iv</sup>

- Forty-seven percent of Kenyans, or 17 million citizens, are unable to afford food with sufficient calories to meet their recommended daily nutritional

requirements, while also meeting their minimal non-food needs.

- Average life expectancy is 58, compared to a world average of 69 and a high-income country average of 79.
- Only 60 percent of Kenyans have access to an improved water source; 80 percent of the population has access to basic sanitation facilities.

Kenya's development aims are laid out in its long-term Vision 2030 plan, which comprises three pillars:

- Economic—Sustained economic growth with an average annual GDP growth rate of 10 percent
- Social—The creation of a just and united society built upon equitable social development
- Political—An accountable democratic system that is issues-based and people centered

The central focus of Vision 2030 is job creation through sound macroeconomic policies, improved governance, efficient public service delivery, and public investments and policies that reduce the cost of doing business. The plan also includes a socio-economic agenda focusing on reducing inequalities in access to productive resources and basic goods and services. Furthermore, it promotes actions leading to the sustainable management of natural commons such as land, water and forests that the very poor depend on for day-to-day survival.<sup>v</sup>

## Media Environment

Healthy flows of information are often predicated on an open and vibrant media sector. Unfortunately, recent legislation and restrictions have cast some doubt on Kenya's commitment to this. In its 2009 Freedom of the Press Index, nonprofit democracy and media watchdog Freedom House described Kenya as "Partly Free," ranking the country 128<sup>th</sup> of 195 countries included in the index, and only just above the numerical cutoff point for being labeled "Not Free."<sup>vi</sup>

The so-called ICT bill, ratified by President Kibaki in January of 2009, was hailed by the technology sector as a market booster but raised serious concerns among media support organizations. Reporters Sans Frontières charged that the bill violates democratic standards by providing for heavy fines and prison sentences for media offences.

In addition, the bill grants the information minister unilateral power to interrupt broadcasts, dismantle radio and TV stations and tap telephones. The internal security minister is empowered to seize broadcasting equipment without referring to any other authority. The bill also envisages the creation of a government-appointed "communications commission" that would be in charge of granting broadcast licenses and would be responsible for ensuring the "good taste" of broadcasts.<sup>vii</sup>

Generally speaking, some in the media view regulators such as the Communication Commission of Kenya and the Ministry of Information and Communications as barriers to, rather than champions for, a healthy media

environment. In addition, reports of intimidation and politically-motivated arrests of journalists are common.<sup>viii</sup>

In addition to the state-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the media landscape is dominated by two private companies: Nation Media Group and The Standard Group. Both are active across multiple platforms, having expanded over the years from

successful newspaper operations to include TV, radio and website properties. Still, the KBC tends to dominate reach outside major urban centers, with coverage faulted by some critics as generally favorable to the government.<sup>ix</sup>

The number of private radio stations continues to increase, with many smaller stations broadcasting in local languages.<sup>x</sup> In addition to the official languages of Swahili and English, more than 65 other languages are spoken in Kenya; **the growth of radio broadcasting in Kikuyu,**

**Luo, Kalenjin, and other languages reflects the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country.**

According to Freedom House, local-language radio has been "increasing public participation as well as commentary unfavorable to the government through call-in shows.

Unfortunately, many of these vernacular stations were accused of broadcasting ethnic hate speech in the wake of the [2007] election."<sup>xi</sup>

In addition to commercial local-language radio, there are a very small number of community

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radio stations (typically local-language, volunteer-run stations broadcasting to an 8 kilometer radius or less). These community stations have drawn both praise and criticism, though many earned kudos for relatively balanced reporting during the post-election conflict.<sup>xii</sup>

Kenya is also an innovator in citizen journalism and crowd-sourced news and information, exemplified by the high-profile role of the Ushahidi website during the 2008 civil unrest. Ushahidi aggregated and mapped reports of violence and atrocities that were reported by citizens via email, SMS and Twitter messages.

### **Information and Communication Technologies**

As Ushahidi clearly demonstrated, new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are broadening the range of information options for both citizens and policy actors worldwide.

Indeed, Kenya is in some ways at the cutting edge of ICT development in Africa; mobile phones are becoming more widespread, with 42 subscriptions per 100 people in 2008, compared to an average of 32 per 100 for Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

The level of access has grown rapidly since 2003, when Kenya was on par with the continent's average at that time of five mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.<sup>xiii</sup>

Much of the growth has come from the expansion of Safaricom, which began as part of the state telecommunications monopoly, was partially privatized in 1997, and became a public company in 2002.<sup>xiv</sup> Vodafone Group Plc of the U.K. has a 40 percent stake in Safaricom, whose successful strategy has featured low-cost, pay-

as-you-go plans that are affordable even to very poor Kenyan households.<sup>xv</sup>

Landline telephone coverage remains largely inaccessible to many Kenyans, with the country possessing less than one telephone line per every 100 people. Investment in ICTs has focused instead on bringing mobile and internet access to all parts of the country.

**Although growth in mobile access has been rapid, it has by no means brought full coverage, and internet access remains limited, especially in rural areas.**<sup>xvi</sup>

Indeed, low levels of access are reflected in Kenya's ranking of 116<sup>th</sup> globally (10<sup>th</sup> in Africa) in the International Telecommunications Union's 2009 ICT Development Index. That said, the policy actors interviewed for this report said they had both personal and professional web access.

The country's ICT capabilities are poised to get a major boost from the SEACOM fiber optic cable, which reached Mombasa in July 2009 with the promise of vastly expanding bandwidth, increasing connection speeds, and lowering costs.

Kenya will also be connected via the East Africa Submarine Cable System (EASSy) and The East Africa Marine System (TEAMS).<sup>xvii</sup>

Additional bandwidth may contribute to greater internet access in homes, businesses and internet cafes across the country. An increasingly popular alternative form of internet access—via mobile phones—may grow as well. However, improvements are still needed to last-mile connectivity and cost structures to support affordable broadband web access to consumers.

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Kenyans have already fully embraced one innovative use of mobile phones: financial transactions. Safaricom introduced M-PESA, its money transfer service, in 2007, and it already boasts more than 7.5 million registered users. M-PESA has handled transfers of more than 230 billion Kenyan Shillings (approximately \$3 billion) within Kenya. Its latest innovation, announced in October 2009, will allow remittances from the U.K. to be transferred directly to M-PESA users.<sup>xviii</sup>

Following on the success of M-PESA, new players have begun to enter the mobile money market in Kenya and replicate the services in other countries. The ability of services like M-PESA to provide comprehensive banking solutions to the bulk of the unbanked population is still under debate, but the field is growing and changing rapidly.<sup>xix</sup>

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