Media as Policy Makers' Tool and its Diplomatic Roles in Peace Building in Kenya

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Abstract

Media initiative as a policymaker is not a recent one. In conflict prevention and peace building, media have historically shaped the views of policy-makers and the public on conflicts. Media's initiatives in interpreting information also affects the creation of policy, especially as media provide ideas as to how to prevent and recover from violent conflicts. The media is also used by politicians and policymakers to deliver their message. It is also possible for the media to control policymaking, especially in humanitarian disaster situations, as is sometimes the case with Cabal News Network, whose images of humanitarian crises force states to intervene militarily to stop death. The study sought to examine how media plays its role as policy formulation and diplomatic initiative. The study population comprised editors and journalists from media houses, opinion leaders, religious organizations and media analysts drawn from the academia, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Kenya National Council for Human Rights. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 50% respondents drawn from the target population of 420. Data collection was done through questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions, participant observations and analysis of documentary records. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found out that media role as a policy maker tool was not a significant predictor in peace building. The media particularly contributes in areas of democracy and good governance, political transparency, foreign policy and human rights. As agenda-setters, they influence the issues on public agenda. As such, media freedom is fundamental in democracy and therefore it should be non-negotiable. The media must report the truth without undue misrepresentation of facts, sensationalism, propaganda and bias. Ownership of the media should be spread to avoid the monopoly of a few, powerful individuals, corporations or governments. Display or transmission of violent media materials should be controlled to reduce negative influence on societies.

Key Words: Media, Policy Makers, Tool, Diplomatic Roles, Peace Building, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Media's initiatives in interpreting information also affects the creation of policy, especially as media provide ideas as to how to prevent and recover from violent conflicts. The media is also used by politicians and policy-makers to deliver their message. It is also possible for the media to control policymaking, especially in humanitarian disaster situations, as is sometimes the case with Cabal News Network, whose images of humanitarian crises force states to intervene militarily to stop death.

For instance, in Bosnia, the media played a very important role in motivating the public to press their policymakers to intervene to stop the aggression (Gilboa, 2002).

Galtung (2002) invented the concept of ‗peace journalism' which calls for peace-building through constructive discourse. In peace journalism, the problem is people who use violence to address conflicts. This form of journalism seeks an understanding of different groups' objectives and needs within their shared cultural and historic context. Instead of a careful recitation of losses and damage caused or experienced by each side, which is the hallmark of international media when covering a conflict which they are strangers to, peace journalism focuses on mutual experiences of suffering. This kind of journalism is openly directed to peace building, and cannot be achieved through the ordinary distribution of information. It calls for a proactive approach to reporting, and openly demonstrates a bias towards peaceful ways of addressing conflict (Galtung, 2002).

Policy can be made during the agenda setting process. Agenda setting initially focuses on common subjects that are most important, before it later decides which parts of the subject are important. ―The media agenda affects public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda‖ (Rogers & Dearing, 1997). Similar sentiments are held by Shaw and McCombs (1977) who display abundant evidence that editors and broadcasters play an important role as they decide which news to publish. Policy is not inherently positive; a media outlet may develop a policy aimed at disseminating hate speech, or political sycophancy, which may lead to conflict. Thus peace building media policy making should be under the constant scrutiny of stakeholders.

Media initiative as a policy-maker is not a recent one. In conflict prevention and peace-building, media have historically shaped the views of policy-makers and the public on conflicts. From the Crimean War in the nineteenth century, which was covered by print media, to the American Civil War, in which photo journalism (then in it's infancy) and print media were used to influence policy, to World War II covered by cinema newsreels, radio and daily newspapers, and the wars in the Persian Gulf (1991) and the invasion of Iraq (2002), which were under the close examination of global television and the 24-hour news cycle, media has shaped the views of policy makers and the public on war and the prospects of peace.

By stimulating discussions on peace building, the media can shape the public agenda to peace building dialogues. The media does not have the power to hypnotize the public, but in many events they can affects the scope of public thinking. This assessment of the media as a policymaker is also shown in Cohen's (1963) statement that ―the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about‖ (Cohen, as cited in Rogers & Dearing, 2001, p. 1).

An extreme example of the policy-making power of the media is shown by what commentators and scholars describe as the ―CNN effect‖ which is a summary of the dominance of global television coverage in world affairs, especially in conflicts (Robinson, 2002). The term suggests that television coverage forces authorities to take actions they otherwise would not have taken (Gilboa, 2005). Thus, powerful

media organizations can determine the national interest and usurp policy making from elected and appointed officials, as the media is often perceived as having greater moral authority than the government. In relation to governments and conflict, ―governments use broadcasting to help build or reinforce value consensus among key support groups, as well as to promote cooperation from integral state institutions in service of policy goals‖ (Zaffiro, 2002). This is true of state media. However, private media tend to support the policy agenda of their owners.

Gilboa (2002) asserts that media acts as policy-maker indirectly, since it has influence on the ultimate policy makers, namely the government, particularly as they think about how to prevent and respond to conflict. Media can also be a tool of policy makers to deliver their message, but there is no guarantee, especially in internal conflicts, that the message delivered will be in support of peace. Media can also be used to motivate the public to press their policy makers to intervene to stop conflict.

Policy advocacy is, of course, a recognized and accepted function of a newspaper, the chief locus for this is the editorial page, and when most reporters talk explicitly about advocacy as a newspaper's function rather than as something they themselves engage in, they assign it to the editorial page. For some people, advocacy is the leading function of newspapers through the editorial page. Experiences of the abrogation of the one party state, call for police reform, and freedom of press sentiments in Kenya demonstrated that policy advocacy or crusading journalism has had a pride of place among the Kenyan press, right from the period of agitation for independence in Kenya.

An example of such crusading journalism concerns the scandal in the Ministry of Health in Kenya in 1996. The independent Kenyan press shed light on a deal to purchase chemicals for the control of malaria, which had been authorized by the Minister of Health. The media lifted the lid on the corrupt deal, in which the anti-malaria chemicals, which had not been officially approved, would be purchased through a foreign firm, Equip Agencies Ltd. at a price far in excess of what it would cost to source them locally. The deal also included a side payment of 400,000,000 Kenya Shillings to Equip Agencies Ltd, but no goods were delivered. The scandal was brought to light during the visit of an International Monetary Fund team, which put pressure on the government to resolve the issue (Githongo 1997). This shows that media can have a significant effect on making changes at policy level in government.

Another way in which the media influences the creation of policy is by agenda setting. This is one of the most important initiatives of the media, and it is a function of the synergistic relationship between the media and the public under the media's watchdog initiative. It is defined as the process whereby the media determine what we think and worry about. Lippmann, who first observed this function in the 1920s, pointed out that the public reacts not to actual events, but to the pictures in our head (Lippmann, 1922). The effect of agenda-setting is epitomized in the famous Cohen's quote that the press ―may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling it's readers what to think about‖ (Cohen, 1963).

Rogers and Dearing (1997) identify two levels of agenda setting. The first level enacts the common subjects that are most important while the second decides what parts of the subject are important. According to them, the media agenda affects public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda. Thus the media may influence policy directly, as happened in the malaria chemicals scandal, or indirectly, by mobilizing the public, which is usually a function of editorial policy. McCombs and Shaw (1977) point out that there is abundant evidence that editors and broadcasters play an important role as they go through their tasks in deciding and publicizing news.

The concept of agenda setting is for the press to selectively choose what we see or hear in the media. According to Ghorpade (1986), ―agenda setting is a relational concept that specifies a transfer of salience from agenda primers (media) to agenda adopters (consumers).‖ The power of the news media to set a nation‘s agenda, to focus public attention on few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. To summarize the extent of agenda-setting influence, researchers calculate the correlation between the ranking of issues on the media agenda and the ranking accorded the same issues on the public agenda. A pertinent example of this is the US Presidential Election of 1968. McCombs and Shaw empirically tested the theory in which they asked the Chapel Hill voters of North Carolina to name the most important issues of the day; their responses closely reflected the pattern of news coverage during the previous month in newspapers, television and magazines (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the authors do not acknowledge that in rare instances, the readers may influence the issues which the newspapers decide to cover. Nevertheless, in the current globalized set up, the power of the consumer has been usurped by the power of the shareholder, with the result that the media more often play the policy agenda setting role than the public.

Finally, Robinson (2000) suggests that only under certain and generally unlikely conditions might one expect media coverage to force intervention decisions. This is possible in the current age of the 24-hour news cycle, where a news story on heavy rotation may attract public attention, which causes authorities to take notice, and potentially to make changes in policy. Media content can also affect policies, since leaders today prefer to communicate through media programmes to accelerate political decisions rather than, using traditional diplomatic channels.

Challenges Facing Media in Regard to Conflict Prevention and Peace Building

Persistence of Stereotypes and Political Manipulations. One of the challenges that the media have to overcome in situations of conflict is that of the persistence of stereotypes, which are extremely resistant to new images that attempt to question their validity (Kelman, 1997). Moreover, colonisation in Africa had created artificial borders that have divided people, cultures and resources. Besides, African countries were challenged by issues of governance and autocratic rule (Diop, 2005). The context encompasses the sociological, economic and political setting in which a conflict occurs. The better understanding of contextual factors, like class, history, ethnicity, environment, media, and nationality, may help to reach appropriate solutions to the conflict (Abdalla, 2002). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the context of land conflict in Masisi is shaped by class (elite and military versus rural

people), environment (geographic proximity of Rwanda and Congolese borders), history (land as an ancestral heritage and ruled by king), ethnicity and nationality (invasion of non-indigenous, non-Congolese people), media (reporting of the conflict information), and religion (education for positive pathways for resolving conflicts and getting together for peace).

The DRC media has an important role to play in the success of early warning and conflict prevention processes. However, as mentioned above, if the pivotal role of media is misused, the consequences can be very tragic. Besides, preventive reporting of potential dangers or conflicts can be sometimes sensibly problematic, exposing the media practitioners to aggression, menace and even killings by different parties directly or indirectly involved in such conflicts (Chukwueme, 1996).

Conceptual Challenges. Conceptual challenges exist alongside operational challenges. Peace building is a messy and complex endeavour, and there remains much to be learned about what actually drives and sustains peace. Peace building includes communication challenges a weakened public and private media may not be able to provide independent and reliable information, undermining the potential for a strategic public information campaign.

Privacy and Ethical Challenges. Privacy is another challenge in dealing with the wealth of information gathered from new communication tools. In any situation of armed conflict, any conversations with protection actors can put people at risk, not only because of the sensitive nature of the information collected, but because mere participation in a protection process can cause people to be stigmatized or targeted. The risks they incur can range from physical violence to social marginalization, and are often unknown to the person soliciting the information and, sometimes also by the person providing it. It is therefore imperative that any organization that collects information linked to individuals or incidents for protection purposes should manage the risks associated with this process and adopt an appropriate code of conduct (ICT for Peace Foundation, 2011, p. 18).

Warfield (2002) suggests that those involved in peace-building are challenged with a conflict within a conflict in that there is the conflict situation in which peace-building will be involved but also the ethical dilemma in which the peace-builder might also be involved (p. 215). Warfield summarizes his argument by proposing that ethical dilemmas in a peace-building situation are quite similar to those found in interpersonal conflict situations (ibid.). Finally, Warfield offers four stages for peace-builders to resolve ethical dilemmas: in stage one, the peace-builder should pause and process the dilemma internally before moving forward; stage two is a reflection stage in which the peace-builder compares the situation with his or her own set of ethics; stage three involves a sharing process that engages others in the dilemma; and stage four, a stage to determine options and select a solution, is burdened with the element of choice for it is in this stage that the peace-builder asks ―how strongly you hold the personal value at stake, how sharply it diverges from the value held by the general profession, and your knowledge of what other have done in similar situations‖ (Warfield, 2002, p. 218-221).

In terms of sensationalism, the principle is founded in the idea that news media have a ―vested interest in conflict‖ (Wolfsfeld *et al*., 2001; Ito, 1990). The media give opposing sides in a conflict the ability to have two-way communications and often, this is antithetical to the premise of the operation (Strobel, 1997). Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But it is often through good reporting that conflict is reduced as noted by Howard (2003).

Statement of the Problem

Majority of the literature on conflict prevention and peace building (Bratic, 2006; Hamelink, 2002; Wolfsfied, 2004) holds a dismal opinion on the role of media initiatives in the peace building processes. Existing literature portrays the media as vital in reporting and generating discussion on conflicts (Bratic, 2006). Scholars on the conflict prevention and peace building phenomenon conclude that the crisis is deeply rooted in political and ethnic violence and based on negative ethnicity that is fuelled by politicians. However, media initiatives in the conflict, as well as its ability to mediate in peace building are not adequately tackled. Much has been done on its role in escalating conflict than building peace.

There are still serious inter communal conflicts in Africa leading to loss of lives, destruction of property and thus economic stagnation. There are many examples from Kenya, including the Tana Delta, Maasai and Kisii border, Kericho/Kisii, Baragoi among other inter-communal conflicts. In most of these cases, the media has been accused of facilitating these conflicts and not using its privileged position to prevent conflicts between communities. Based on Kenya's post-election violence of 2007/2008 following the release of the disputed results, IMS (2009) opines that three views emerged over the role of media that it failed to stoke the violence by failing to report media actually fuelled the violence. It showed the roles of media as both positive and negative and provides a linkage between media freedom and human dignity. However, if it is possible to use the media for a bad purpose, then it should also be possible to use it for a good purpose. No wonder the state censored live news coverage immediately conflict erupted in 2008.

Uasin Gishu County being cosmopolitan experienced violence in the previous elections cycles and had serious conflicts resulting in deaths, displacements and loss of property. In the field of Communication, it is of interest to know empirically the role of media in peace building considering the continual escalation of conflicts, particularly, in Uasin Gishu County and even globally.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are specific to the context of inter communal relations in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The possibility for the general applicability of the findings is limited by the scope, the sample, and the cultural context of this study. Although there could be common features, the findings may not have general applicability to other systems. Despite these limitations, it should be noted that a research study of this nature would hopefully contribute to the generation of new

ideas and perspectives about conflict prevention and peace building. The study will be a further step in the scientific analysis of role of media in conflict prevention and peace building.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County that lies in the mid-west of Rift Valley region in Kenya. The County borders six counties, namely Elgeyo Marakwet County to the East, Trans-Nzoia to the north, Kericho to the south, Baringo to south East, Nandi to the south west and Bungoma to west. The County derived its name from the Illwusin-Kishu, a Maasai clan that used it for grazing their animals. With the coming of the colonialist, the name was coined as Uasin Gishu. The County is largely a cosmopolitan hosting the Kalenjin who are the majority. Other communities with notable presence include the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Kisii among others. It has a population of 894,179 according to the 2009 census report.

This study was guided by the mixed methods approach that combines both the quantitative and qualitative research. This study adopted an integrative mixed methods design which affords a rigorous and integrative analysis of qualitative textual evidence and quantitative numeric data as observed by Schwandt (1994). The study utilized descriptive case study design. This is because a good research design ensures that the information collected is consistent with the objectives of the study and that the procedures regarding data collection is accurate and efficient (Kratwohl, 1998).

The target population for the study included editors and journalists from Radio, Television and Newspapers, the public that is made up of citizen's opinion leaders and religious organizations and policy category includes media analysts drawn from academia, Non-Governmental Organization and Kenya National Commission on Human Rights. The study adopted the stratified and simple random sampling procedures in selecting the required sample for this study. A sample size of 210 respondents representing 50% of target population representatives (selected for the study. The sample covered both gender in equal representation of the study area.

The study used the following instruments to collect the data: Questionnaire, Interview Schedule, Focus Group Discussions Personal Observations and Survey of documentary records methods. The data for the study was coded for completeness and accuracy of information at the end of every field data collection day and before storage. Data capturing was done using Microsoft Excel. This is a study of relationship of various variables. After the data collection a correlational analysis was performed to ascertain the existence of a relationship between the variables. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Descriptive statistics such as Frequency Distribution was used to present the characteristics of the media in conflict prevention and peace building as well as to profile the respondents' personal information.

RESULTS

The Media Initiative as Policy Maker's Tool

The study focused on the extent to which the media's initiative as policy maker's tool affects conflict prevention and peace building. The media initiative as policy makers' tool was therefore measured using four items. Responses were elicited on a 5-point scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

The results presented in Table 1 suggest that respondents agree with the expressed views of the media as policy makers' tool. They agreed that the media plays a initiative in shaping the views of policy-makers and influencing popular opinion on conflicts (M=4.14, SD=0.683); that the media is used to motivate the public to press their policy makers to intervene to stop conflicts (M=3.99, SD= 1.003); that the media acts as a tool for policy makers to get their messages across (M=395, SD=1.77); that the media shapes what we see and hear about conflict (M=3.81, SD=1.095); and that the media acts as policy-making organ since it has influence on policy makers (M=3.60, SD=1.371).

Table 1. Extent to which the media plays its initiative as policy maker tool

Media initiative as policy maker's tool	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media plays its initiative in shaping the views of policy-makers and influencing popular opinion on conflicts	4.14	.683
Media act as policy maker since it has influence on policy makers	3.60	1.371
Media act as a tool of policy maker to get across the message	3.95	1.177
Media is used to motivate the public to press their policy maker to intervene to stop conflict	3.99	1.003
Media shape what we see and hear about conflict	3.81	1.095

These views pertaining to the media as policy-makers' tool were strongly advanced through the Interview Schedule. When asked about the effects of media initiative as policy makers' tool with regard to conflict prevention and peace building, the respondents overwhelmingly responded that the media can manipulate certain policies to be adopted by policy makers. Furthermore, they observed that the media motivates the public to press their policy makers to take a stand on topical issues pertaining to conflict prevention and peace-building.

The Media as a Diplomatic Initiative

The study also sought to find out the extent to which media as diplomatic initiative affects conflict prevention and peace building. A total of nine items were used to measure the role of the media as a diplomatic initiative. As shown in Table 2, the mean response to all the items was approximately 4.00. This indicates that respondents were in agreement with the conceptualized initiatives. Particularly, respondents agreed that the media communication can be an important element of stabilization, reconstruction and peace building (M=4.32, SD=0.713); that media is used to cover diplomatic initiative and send messages back and forth between sides of conflict (M=4.32, SD=0.713); that media provide a positive and participatory forum

for the exchange of ideas, democracy and nation building (M=4.02, SD=1.267), among others.

Table 2. Extent to which the media plays its role of diplomatic initiatives

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media and communication can be an important element of stabilization, reconstruction and peace building	4.32	.713
Media is used to cover diplomatic initiative and send messages back and forth between sides of conflict	4.19	.812
Media help to build bridges among enemies and build confidence needed to open negotiations	3.96	.968
Media can lessen polarization between groups; showing the other in a similar light to self, depicting as having the same types of problems	3.95	.856
Media promote positive relationships between groups, particularly in conflicts over ethnic, national and religious identities	3.97	.910
Media can lessen polarization between groups by sharing similar interests and positions and condemning violence	3.89	.808
Media is thus used as a bridge builder, seeking the common ground between one's owns group and the other group	3.80	1.177
Media ensure that the public have realistic expectations about what can be achieved, and about the length of time necessary to achieve long term, positive results	3.86	1.234
Media provide a positive and participatory forum for the exchange of ideas, democracy, and nation building	4.02	1.267

When asked to state how the media role of diplomatic initiatives affected conflict prevention and peace building, the main response indicated that the respondents recognized the role of the media in communicating and stabilizing peace building through participatory forums and promotion of relationships. Besides, it was also noted that through diplomacy, the media gives a fair play of parties' controversy which helps in mitigation of the disputes.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the extent to which the media's initiative as policy makers' tool affects conflict prevention and peace building, the findings suggest that respondents agree with the expressed views of the media as a policy makers' tool. They agree that the media plays a role in shaping the views of policy-makers and influencing popular opinion on conflicts; is used to motivate the public to press their policy makers to intervene to stop conflicts; acts as a tool for policy makers to get their messages across and that the media shapes what we see and hear about conflict. These views pertaining to the media as policy maker's tool were strongly advanced through the interview schedule. The respondents overwhelmingly responded that the media can manipulate certain policies to be adopted by policy makers. Results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that the media as policy makers tool was not a significant predictor of conflict prevention and peace building ($\beta=0.124$, $p<0.05$).

These findings concur with the findings of Gilboa (2002) who reports that in Bosnia, the media played a very important role in motivating the public to press their policy makers to intervene to stop the aggression. According to Rogers and Dearing (1997), the media agenda affects public agenda which in-turn affects the policy agenda. In addition, the findings are consistent with the findings of Gilboa (2005) that television coverage forces authorities to take actions they otherwise would not have taken. Similar sentiments are held by Shaw and McCombs, who display abundant evidence that editors and broadcasters play an important role as they decide which news to publish (Shaw & McCombs, 1977).

In addition, the study sought to find out the extent to which the media's role in diplomatic initiatives affects conflict prevention and peace building. A total of nine items were used to measure the role of the media as a diplomatic initiative. As shown in Table 2, the mean response to all the items was approximately 4.00. This indicates that respondents were in agreement with the conceptualized initiative. The analyzed results regarding the media as a watchdog indicated that the respondents recognized the role of the media in communicating and stabilizing peace building through participatory forums and promotion of relationships. Besides, it was also noted that through diplomacy, the media gives a fair play of parties' controversy which helps in mitigation of the disputes.

The multiple regression analysis indicates that the media as diplomatic initiatives ($\beta=0.310$, $p<0.01$) were found to positively and significantly influence conflict prevention and peace building. The significant standardized coefficient for media as diplomatic initiatives indicate that, a 1% increase in media diplomatic initiatives is likely to lead to a 0.310% boost in conflict prevention and peace building. These findings support those found by other scholars (Gilboa, 2002; Bratic & Schirch, 2007). According to Gilboa (2009), the media can facilitate diplomacy by inviting leaders of opposing groups to talk with each other as well as helping build confidence needed to open negotiations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The media particularly contribute in areas of democracy and good governance, political transparency, foreign policy and human rights. As agenda-setters, they influence the issues on public agenda. The media freedom is fundamental in democracy and therefore it should be non-negotiable. Media must report the truth without undue misrepresentation of facts, sensationalism, propaganda and bias.

Ownership of the media should thus be spread to avoid the monopoly of a few, powerful individuals, corporations or governments. Display or transmission of violent media materials should be controlled to reduce negative influence on societies. There is need for increased attention to participatory, user-generated citizen's media where digital content and new technologies are looked at as alternative sources than relying on the traditional media. Media houses should strive to improve and strictly observe media laws and ethics and promote effective self-regulation.

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