

# People Speaking Back?

## Media, Empowerment and Democracy in East Africa (MEDIEA)

*'The role of the media and of communication structures at all levels (community, sub regional, national, regional and international) is inextricably bound up with how citizens understand and engage in democratic life. The rights and capacities of people, particularly those living in poverty, to voice their own perspectives and have them heard in public debate, particularly through the media, are increasingly recognized as critical to effective governance' (James Deane 2008: 161)*

**This research project will be of 4 years of duration. 'Media, Empowerment and Democracy in East Africa' (MEDIEA) scheduled to start on January 1st 2009 and end on December 31st 2012. Four universities are co-applicants – two Danish and two East African totalling 6 research participants from Kenya, Tanzania and Denmark. They are supplemented by an active international reference group of practical and theoretical leaders in the field of Media, Empowerment and Democracy.**

**MEDIEA comprises of 6 individual research projects, organised around a Kenya focus and Tanzania focus. Additionally, there are components of dissemination, capacity building and policy dialogue. The research program will be hosted by ØRECOMM – Consortium for Communication and Glocal Change at Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies, Roskilde University, Denmark.**

**The core inquiry of MEDIEA** grows from a concern about how young people, young women in particular but not exclusively, are secured a role in both the local, national and regional development processes they belong to and, ideally, should be centrally placed within. How are their governments held accountable for the political decisions they make in this regard, and what opportunities are there for ordinary citizens to voice their opinions and engage both in policy development as well as in the process of critique and holding their governments accountable? Stated bluntly: how can young women and men in Kenya and Tanzania engage in and ensure a participatory governance process? Within this overall problem area, the focus of the MEDIEA research proposal is on civil society and the media.

***The overall objective of MEDIEA is to explore the role civil society driven media and communication technologies potentially can have in enhancing participatory governance processes in East Africa, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania.***

The research project's analytical challenge is to understand the ways and means in which youth as ordinary citizens engage with such civil society driven media and communication platforms and what socio-cultural and political outcomes this may have.

## **A Focus on Youth**

In recent years, youth have become the new focus of development policies of states and international donor agencies as well as among NGOs and CSOs. Not only are youth perceived as key to economic, democratic and socio-cultural development. Young people worldwide are also understood as decisive agents with regard to peace processes and political stability on a local and global scale. This focus on youth as a generation of actors and (future) citizens who are increasingly exposed to and make use of media/ICT for entertainment and informational purposes, for social networking and mobilisation, and for knowledge sharing, is justified. The last years' mobile phone boom, observable in many African countries, underlines the eagerness with which young Africans seek to appropriate the new digital media, even under the constrained socio-economic conditions the majority of local youth face.

MEDIEA wishes to focus its research attention primarily at the role of youth – both understood as engaged and high-frequency media users, -consumers and producers – but also as key players in the development processes in countries with so youth-oriented demographic characteristics as is the case in Tanzania and Kenya.

## **Intermediate objectives**

MEDIEA will be case-study based, with 6 participating research projects, all qualitative research, two complementing with quantitative data. The projects will examine a number of development initiatives involving youth in Tanzania and Kenya. Of MEDIEA's 6 sub-projects three are empirically grounded in Kenya and three in Tanzania. In addition to the overall objective being the red thread throughout all sub-projects, six intermediate objectives will guide the research:

- What is the current situation of youth, particularly marginalized female youth, vis-à-vis the development challenge of the country, and how does government, media and civil society act in response to the youth situation?
- How do youth experience, make use of and engage in civil society driven media and communication platforms (be they analogue or digital)?
- What do these media and communication platforms do/produce, and how socially inclusive are the production processes?
- What mechanisms are developed to hold governments accountable and transparent? (what advocacy strategies do the involved civil society organisations have, if any)
- How do the civil society organisations ensure their own legitimacy and accountability to the groups of citizens they advocate on behalf of?
- How is the legitimacy and accountability of the selected NGOs/CSOs experienced at community level?