

PhD Scholarships

The Danish-East African research project, “People Speaking Back? Media, Empowerment and Democracy in East Africa (MEDIeA)”, funded by the Danish Development Agency (Danida), offers two full-time PhD scholarships (36 months) starting on January 1st 2010, using ethnographic perspectives. One will be registered as a PhD student at University of Nairobi, the other at University of Dar es Salaam. Funding will follow provisions of Kenya and Tanzania universities.

About MEDIeA

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, more specifically in Kenya and Tanzania. The core inquiry of MEDIeA grows from a concern about how young people are secured a role in both the local, national and regional development processes.. 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 policy related outcomes this may have.

MEDIeA comprises of a team of 4 researchers in addition to the two PhD students that are about to be contracted. In Kenya, the team consists of Associate Professor Norbert Wildermuth from University of Southern Denmark and Associate Research Professor Winnie Mitullah from University of Nairobi. In Tanzania, the team consists of Professor and Principal Investigator of MEDIeA, Thomas Tufte and Assistant Professor Datus Rweyemanu.

In addition to empirical research, the MEDIeA project comprises of components of dissemination, capacity building and policy dialogue. The research program is hosted by *ØRECOMM – Consortium for Communication and Glocal Change* at Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies, Roskilde University, Denmark: <http://orecomm.net>

Objectives of the PhD

It is the general objective of the announced PhD scholarships to strengthen the overall research efforts of MEDIeA in Kenya and Tanzania. The PhD students are expected to provide community based research which uncovers the synergies and communication relations between everyday life, media use, citizen engagement in social and political processes. The announced PhD projects can be specified as follows:

PhD Project Tanzania:

Media Use, Citizenship and Participatory Communication – A Media Ethnographic Study

A key working hypothesis in this research proposal is that in the course of the last many years’ fight against HIV/AIDS, civil society organisations have engaged and empowered local communities in ways whereby processes empowerment and social change have been articulated. It is MEDIeA’s claim that this is a phenomenon seen across Africa, with initiatives as the Straight Talk organisations in Uganda and Kenya, with ADRA Malawi’s communication initiatives, with N’weti in Mozambique, and not least with the Soul City initiative in South Africa. FEMINA HIP is – with 10 years of experience – one of these sustained initiatives which have achieved societal impact, including at community level. It is the aim of this Ph.D candidate to test this hypothesis. The

question is what exactly is going on at community level, and to which degree some of the identified processes of empowerment and social change may have to do with some of the FEMINA HIP initiated media and communication activities.

It is suggested that the study will primarily, but not exclusively, explore the situation amongst young women. This is a priority given the fact that young women constitute a particularly vulnerable population in many African countries, including in Tanzania. Furthermore, women have traditionally been close to invisible and non-participants in the mediated public sphere and public debate on development issues.

In the process of seeking to identify processes of empowerment and social change in the community and amongst young women in particular, this study will necessarily include a grounded analysis of the strategic communication approach employed by Femina at community level. Deconstructing their communication strategy will be a fundamental element of the study in order to establish possible synergies and links – or the ‘connectivity - between the Femina communication strategy and community-based social change and governance processes. Both individual and collective change processes should be assessed. It is further suggested that the analysis will include issues such as identifying forms of participation, notions of own role in local development, connectivity to and opinions about local and other decision-makers.

Methodology

To explore the above hypothesis the methodology will be qualitative. The study will inscribe itself into the tradition of media ethnographies, where the relationship between mediated discourse and the social and cultural practices of everyday life is explored. This will include medium-term field studies in selected districts.

It is suggested to make use of research tools developed by international organisations such as UNDP/OSG – the information and communication audit tool – or possibly the methodologies developed by PANOS for similar purposes. This should be further investigated.

Geographical focus areas

Two-three districts will be selected to focus the in-depth study on. The selection will be based on a series of criteria, including: a) having both rural and urban cases; b) long-term involvement by Femina; c) areas where Femina has strong collaboration with other NGOs and with CBOs, and d) areas where Femina has collaboration with government authorities. Together the selected areas should constitute an empirical sample where Femina’s impact is assumed to be high, thus assuming that the societal impact at district level is the highest. An experimental design can be suggested, if it can be well justified.

PhD Project Kenya:

Communication, E-participation and Digital Inclusion – A Media Ethnographic Study

This PhD project will provide a bottom-up community based perspective on how young Kenyans in rural and urban settings experience, produce meaning and engage with civil society driven media and communication initiatives.

A key working hypothesis in this research proposal is that contemporary technologies such as electronic mailing lists, peer-to-peer networks, collaborative software, wikis, Internet forums and

blogs are clues to and early potential solutions for some aspects of e-democracy. The Internet can be viewed as a platform and delivery medium for tools that help to eliminate some of the distance constraints in direct democracy. However, technical media for e-democracy can be expected to extend profoundly to mobile technologies such as mobile phones in the African context.

People-centred communication, whether by means of ‘old’ analogue or ‘new’ digital media, plays a significant role, both for the dissemination of information, knowledge sharing, networking and participatory empowerment. Communication initiatives worldwide have demonstrated this for years. In the context of Kenya, the *Women Information and Communication Technology* (WICT Kenya) project and African Network for Health Knowledge Management and Communication (AfriAfya) are well known examples.

Across the globe, new technologies have allowed activists in grassroot NGOs and social movements to mobilise virtual communities and raise awareness of issues that are of the public interest, circumventing state control and connecting directly with citizens the world over. Access to new information and communication technologies is an important component in providing unprecedented opportunities for free speech, political advocacy, education and empowerment.

That is, issues of participation in public debate stand at the centre of study. The character of the proposed PhD is to approach these problematic through a media ethnographic approach ‘from below’.

Methodology

The study will primarily be targeted at some of the young women who are approached and engaged by the communication strategies of a couple yet to be identified local NGOs or CBOs. The organisations to be selected should have a strong focus on Nairobi/an urban reality. The question whether these non-profit initiatives do strengthen the participation of young women in public debate and thus potentially empower them, will ideally be explored by an agency-centred, critically distanced approach that takes the effect of these people-centred communication initiatives not for given. It is suggested to use participant observation of a limited number of (female) youth’s everyday life as a starting point to understand the overall context of their interactions with mainstream media and their communicative engagement by community media and more personalized ICT in a holistic perspective.

The study will inscribe itself into the tradition of media ethnographies, where the relationship between mediated discourse and the social and cultural practices of everyday life is explored. This will include medium-term field studies in the selected community.

Application procedures for both PhD Scholarships

Deadline: 10 August 2009.

Please submit:

1. A research proposal of up to five pages
2. A curriculum vitae including list of publications
3. A writing sample/publication of 5-10.000 words
4. Official transcripts of undergraduate degree and Master’s degree
5. Reference letters (optional)

Applications have to be based on the full advertisement of the specific PhD scholarship you are applying for. As the descriptions both for the Kenya and Tanzania scholarship are already quite elaborate, the applicants are expected to provide their own theoretical-methodological reflection based on the initial outline as well as suggesting and justifying a research design for the actual study.

Who can apply?

We invite applications from students with an MA in social sciences or humanities and with experience in qualitative empirical research, preferably in the field of qualitative reception studies, media ethnography and/or participatory communication studies. Applicants should be prepared to work extended periods in the 'field', in close and prolonged cooperation with the non-governmental and community-based organisations selected as case studies by the MEDIeA team of senior researchers. Applicants must be able to communicate in the relevant language, besides English, as well as demonstrate the necessary 'social' abilities to do research based on a participant observation approach. Finally, it would be beneficial if applicants also have experience with survey-based, quantitative research designs or equivalent qualifications.

Selection

The selection will be based on both the relevant experience of the applicant and quality research proposal.

Successful candidates selected for interviews will be announced on 20 August 2009. Interviews will be conducted on 24 and 25 August at the University of Nairobi and on 1 and 2 September at University of Dar-es-Salaam. Final selection will be announced by 10 September.

Please send your application including appendices in one single pdf file to Kirsten Høffding (hoffding@ruc.dk) at Roskilde University.

Further Information

Should you have questions regarding the content of the proposal, please contact the following:

For the Kenya scholarship: Norbert Wildermuth (wildermuth@litcul.sdu.dk) and Winnie Mitullah (wvmitullah@swiftkenya.com)

For the Tanzania scholarship: Thomas Tufte (ttufte@ruc.dk, offline 3-26 July) and Datus Rweyemanu (datiusr@yahoo.com).