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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN TANZANIA

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Introduction:

It is an open secret that information is key for development, communication, decision making, negotiations and international relations and cooperation.

Information is now the engine that drives decisions on political, economic and social policies and programming.

The role of information and communication media has been associated with their definition and how a particular country is information tolerant and information aware hence the emergence of the much talked about INFORMATION SOCIETY.

Tanzania like many other countries in the world is a participant to this global vision of building a people centred, inclusive and development oriented information society where every one can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge to improve their quality of life.

The Role of Media (Radio).

Together with other responsibilities, Radio is an important development partner and it is an agent to influence change and thought.

Along with African countries' efforts to build democratic society, Radio is a great contributor to democracy and good governance through observing and informing.

Despite Tanzania's low level of development, radio has contributed, and it continues to contribute to the public good by helping to fulfill a number of social needs including the dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the heritage of the past. We realize that we have a rich cultural landscape, which identifies our nation state. Radio Tanzania travels extensively countrywide recording local ngoma, poems, songs and wise sayings and broadcasts the same in various weekly programmes.

We take this initiative to widen individual horizons awakening imagination and stimulating creativity.

Three quarters of all programmes aired over RTD are educational programmes, since the 1970's with the Arusha Declaration in place, this country boasted of an 85% literacy rate, the highest in the world.

Radio played a pivotal role in the attainment of that landslide victory.

Adult education programmes which imparted functional literacy to adults, and gave more than two hours a day secondary and primary education are a constant reminder of what a difference this made to our national effort in eradicating ignorance.

I would hastily add, that the programmes did not replace the teacher but rather complimented his/her efforts.

Forty years after independence the country still struggles with ignorance although everyone has come to appreciate the third phase government's initiative of MMEM, whereby every school age boy or girl has free access to primary education in a comfortable and ideal school environment.

Radio Tanzania re-introduced the schools broadcasts in 2003 through a grant of 10 billion yen provided by the Japanese government. What is more, Education Development Centre, an American NGO, has introduced an innovative programme targeting post child labour candidates through the ILO/IPEC Time Bound Programme.

All these efforts are aimed at enhancing formation of character empowerment, acquisition of skills and knowledge for self improvement so as to faster intellectual development and education.

Tanzania is a staunch believer in equality, peace, tranquil and the dignity of man. Debates, news, commentaries and documentaries carry this social responsibility, through the national radio (RTD).

In developing countries libraries do complement the lacking information. They play a role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society.

They provide the conditions by which people achieve free access to information and knowledge. They also provide opportunities to participate actively in the country's further development into a democratic society.

In TANZANIA, and other developing countries, media plays a role that libraries play in developed countries.

Information provided through media, either print or electronic is fundamental for any society in the modern world. It is the foundation of democracy, capacity building and modernization.

It is an important method for development as it offers vision and dreams, learning, skills and a creative impetus to an individual.

In order to protect the world against ignorance, disease and poverty access to information via media is essential.

THE WAY FORWARD:

What needs to be done is to forge partnerships with other stakeholders such as NGO's, which perform service delivery or what is known today as social marketing. Likewise a multimedia and multidisciplinary approach in dealing with the difficult health issues such as the AIDS pandemic, malaria and other disorders need to be taken in order to formulate the right educational and communication strategies.

We are in the information age, where a balance has to be struck between offering sufficient choice to the audience and broadcasting in the public interest.

As far as content is concerned, we shall strive as much as possible to let the people determine what they need and aspire to hear provided it is accurate, complete, significant, impartial, analytical and relevant.

Since broadcasting is culture, Radio as an agenda setter, will continue to take on board cultural expression from ethnic minorities, women, youth, children, the disabled and poor.

Audiences want to know and be aware of issues that are close to them, which is why programming is everybody's business.

TRAINING:

Because consumers are the very reason why we stay in business, giving training to key personnel in radio broadcasting is very important.

Our broadcasters tend to spend a lot of time dealing with events rather than issues. Likewise, we are not yet digitalized, which means we have to learn new technology if we are to be effective and efficient.

Training in production of local relevant programmes, newsgathering, processing and dissemination, preparation and presentation of voice packages etc. All these have to be done professionally taking into account both technical and content quality.

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT:

The state must provide a general economic environment in which broadcasting can flourish.

This includes but not limited to;

- Promoting the development and spread of appropriate technology including digital transmission and the internet.
- Promoting universal access to the means of communication and reception of broadcasting services including telephones, the internet, and electricity. (Kigoma 100 kwt transmitter is not operational due to power cuts).
- Ensuring maximum geographical reach of broadcasting.
- Ensuring enough investment is made in broadcasting, to allow quality local production, as well as incentives and good remuneration to broadcasters.

If all the aforementioned issues are taken seriously, the building of the information society is going to be a reality. Media though has to play its role responsibly if every member is to be inclusive in the information society in Tanzania.