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## Editorial

# Revisiting Communication and Change Processes in Africa

Peter Ogom Nwosu\*

The scholarly contributions in this issue of AMR represent a pot-pourri of perspectives about communication and change processes in Africa. Isaac Abeku Blankson's contribution focuses on the role of the mass media in emerging democracies. Using Ghana as a case study, Blankson questions whether true democracies requiring the active participation of the citizenry in the political process can emerge in Africa when 'Euro-imperial languages' dominate the media space—the major source of political discourse. The 'language deficiency' in Africa's broadcasting system, he argues is inimical to the democratic process in the continent. In his view, a 'deliberate and planned effort to promote' the use of African languages in local and national broadcasting systems over the dominant 'Euro-imperial languages' is crucial to stemming the tidal wave of negative information that has become injurious to the continent's current development orientation.

How the mass media in Africa have covered the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is the subject of the next essay by Lilian Ndangam and Andrew Kanyegirire. In a sampling of African countries that included Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and others, the authors conclude that Africa's media have shown little consistency in their coverage of this continent-wide development initiative. The findings are significant because what the general population knows and does not know about NEPAD and its relevance to the continent's

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\* Co-Editor, *Africa Media Review*, Professor and Chair, Department of Communication Studies, Director, Center for Human Relations, California State University, Northridge, California, USA. He can be reached at [pnwosu@csun.edu](mailto:pnwosu@csun.edu)

development agenda is a function of what type of coverage, if any, that the mass media chooses to provide. Agenda setting theorists would argue that while the media may not tell us how to think, they sure do tell us, in most instances, what to think about. Thus, they set the agenda for public discourses about relevant issues of the day. It is this point that makes Ndangam and Kanyegirire's essay particularly useful to African social development.

The final contribution in this journal issue focuses on the sudden and rapid growth in access to telephone services in Nigeria, growth that has taken place only in the last five years. In this essay, Chuka Onwumechili examines the implications of this growth in the telecommunication sector for Nigeria's development. While access to telephones in Nigeria had been marginal by the end of the last century with the teledensity rate well below 1:100 for a country of estimated 130 million persons, over 10 million Nigerians today have access to telephones, with growth rates estimated at over 100 per cent per year. Onwumechili notes that while rapid growth has occurred mostly in Nigeria's urban centers, much work is still needed to reach critical mass in the rural areas in ways that would permit people to reach out while at the same time providing a telecommunication framework that supports development initiatives.

Overall, the contributions in this issue of AMR are perceptive and stimulating. They all focus on the central role that communication plays to service development and public opinion. How communication is then utilized or manipulated to provide this service depends on the policies and the ideological apparatus in place to support and promote such service. This utilization or manipulation has fundamental implications for the nature and direction of change processes in any society.

## Éditorial

### **Revisiter la communication et les processus de changement en Afrique**

Peter Ogom Nwosu\*

Les contributions de savants dans ce numéro de AMR constituent un « pot-pourri » des perspectives de la communication et des processus de changement en Afrique. La contribution d'Isaac Abeku Blankson porte sur le rôle de la presse dans les démocraties émergentes. En prenant le Ghana comme étude de cas, Blankson se demande si de vraies démocraties, avec une participation active des citoyens dans le processus de changement, peuvent émerger en Afrique lorsque les « langues impérialistes européennes » imposent leur domination sur l'espace médiatique- qui est la principale source de discours politique. Le déficit linguistique dans le système africain de diffusion, constate-t-il, ne favorise pas le processus de démocratisation sur le continent. Ainsi, un « effort soutenu et planifié de promotion » de l'utilisation des langues africaines dans les systèmes nationaux et locaux de diffusion à la place des « langues impérialistes européennes » reste crucial si l'on veut enrayer le raz-de-marée d'informations négatives qui deviennent dangereuses pour l'orientation actuelle du continent vers le développement.

La manière dont la presse africaine a couvert le Nouveau Partenariat pour le Développement de l'Afrique (NEPAD) est le sujet de l'essai de Lilian Ndangam et d'Andrew Kanyeirire. Après l'étude d'un échantillon de pays africains dont le Nigeria, l'Afrique du Sud, le Kenya, le Rwanda, l'Ouganda et d'autres, les auteurs ont tiré la conclusion selon laquelle la

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\* Co-Rédacteur, *Revue africaine des médias*, Professeur, Department of Communication Studies, Director, Center for Human Relations, California State University, Northridge, California, USA. Email: pnwosu@csun.edu

presse africaine a fait preuve de peu de consistance dans sa couverture de cette vaste initiative continentale de développement. Les résultats sont significatifs, parce que ce que l'opinion publique sait et ne sait pas du NEPAD et de sa place dans l'agenda de développement du continent est fonction du type de couverture médiatique, s'il y en a, que la presse choisit d'en faire. Les théoriciens des agendas pourraient dire que même si la presse ne peut pas nous dicter une manière de pensée, dans la plupart des cas, elle nous fournit la matière à penser. Par conséquent, c'est elle qui fournit l'agenda des discours publics sur les questions quotidiennes. C'est cela qui rend l'essai de Ndangam et de Kanye girire particulièrement intéressant pour le développement social de l'Afrique.

La dernière contribution dans ce numéro de la revue porte sur la croissance soudaine et rapide de l'accès aux services téléphoniques au Nigeria, croissance qui n'a explosé qu'au cours de ces 5 dernières années. Dans cet essai, Chuka Onwumechili examine les enjeux de cette croissance du secteur des télécommunications pour le développement du Nigeria. Si l'accès aux appareils téléphoniques au Nigeria était encore marginal jusqu'à la fin du dernier siècle, avec un taux de télédensité en dessous de 1% pour un pays dont la population est estimée à 130 millions de personnes, on constate que plus de 10 millions de Nigériens ont aujourd'hui accès aux téléphones, avec des taux de croissance estimés à plus de 100% par an. Onwumechili note que tandis que cette croissance rapide concerne essentiellement les centres urbains du Nigeria, il reste cependant beaucoup à faire pour atteindre une masse critique dans les zones rurales, de sorte à favoriser un meilleur accès pour les populations, tout en mettant en place un cadre pour les télécommunications capable d'appuyer les initiatives de développement.

De façon générale, les contributions dans ce numéro d'AMR sont pleines de clairvoyance et d'intérêt. Elles mettent toutes l'accent sur le rôle central que joue la communication pour servir le développement et l'opinion publique. La manière dont la communication est alors utilisée ou manipulée pour lui permettre de jouer ce rôle dépend des politiques et de l'appareil idéologique en place pour favoriser et promouvoir ce rôle. Cette utilisation ou manipulation a des implications fondamentales sur la nature et l'orientation des processus de changement dans toute société.



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## Negotiating the Use of Native Languages in Emerging Pluralistic and Independent Broadcast Systems in Africa

Isaac Abeku Blankson\*

### Abstract

Since the 1990s liberal and democratic reforms in African countries, competitive independent and pluralistic broadcastings, particularly radio, have emerged to provide channel and program diversity for the first time in these emerging democracies. Independent radio has become an entrée into civic discourse and socio-political awareness and a force for social and political integration and accountability. However, these positive developments have overshadowed the observation that Africa's emerging independent radio has become an avenue for corroding their societies' languages and cultures. While they have been insensitive to native languages, they are successful in domesticating the languages of their former European colonizers. Using the experiences of Ghana's radio, this article raises important questions about the relationship between Africa's native languages and the development of a true African broadcasting system. It calls for a re-examination of the belief that the multilingual character of African societies does not serve broadcasting well. It argues that a true African broadcast system that allows for mass participation can develop only if African broadcasters and policy makers address the native language deficiency in broadcasting. Finally, it calls for a deliberate and planned effort to promote the use of African native languages over Euro-imperial languages in broadcasting.

**Key terms:** broadcasting system, european languages, independent radio, privatisation, democratic reforms.

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\* Isaac Abeku Blankson is Associate Professor and Director of Technology in the Department of Speech Communication at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Illinois, USA. He can be reached at email: [iblanks@siue.edu](mailto:iblanks@siue.edu).

## Résumé

Depuis les réformes libérales et démocratiques qui ont eu lieu dans les pays Africains, des canaux de radiodiffusion indépendants et pluralistes concurrents, des chaînes radios en particulier, sont apparus et offrent une certaine diversité de chaînes et de programmes, ce qui constitue une première dans ces démocraties émergentes. Les radios indépendantes constituent le premier pas vers le discours civique et la prise de conscience socio-politique, mais sont également une force favorisant l'intégration et la responsabilité sociopolitique. Cependant, ces développements positifs ne doivent pas occulter l'observation selon laquelle ces radios africaines émergentes sont devenues un moyen de destruction des langues et cultures sociétales du continent. En effet, celles-ci ne sont pas ouvertes aux langues locales, mais privilégient les langues de leurs anciens colonisateurs européens. En se basant sur l'expérience des radios ghanéennes, cet article soulève d'importantes questions concernant la relation entre les langues locales africaines et le développement d'un véritable système de radiodiffusion africain. Il remet en question l'idée selon laquelle le caractère multilingue des sociétés africaines dessert le principe de radiodiffusion. Il soutient qu'un véritable système africain de radiodiffusion permettant la participation des masses ne peut se développer que si les responsables africains de la radiodiffusion ainsi que les décideurs politiques s'attaquent au problème de la sous-représentation des langues locales dans ce milieu médiatique. Enfin, cette communication appelle à des efforts planifiés, afin de privilégier l'usage des langues locales africaines sur les langues euro-impérialistes dans le domaine de la radiodiffusion.

**Mots clés:** communication audio-visuelle, langues européenne, radio indépendant, privatisation, processus de réformes démocratique.

## Introduction

Language plays a very critical role in national broadcasting systems. While Western and Asian countries have relied on their own languages for broadcasting, sub-Saharan African countries continue to rely overwhelmingly on Euro-imperial languages—English or French—for broadcasting even though the majority of their population does not comprehend these languages. African broadcasters, policy makers and media scholars have traditionally failed to examine the implications of dependency on these foreign languages for the development of a true African broadcasting system. They also have failed to examine the role that dependency on foreign languages has played in the failure of national broadcasting systems to encourage civic participation in the media. On the contrary, media scholars have typically attributed the failure of national broadcasting systems to heavy government control and censorship, inadequate resources, unstable

political structures and poor programming content (Ansah 1985; Bourgault 1995).

Using the experience of Ghana's emerging pluralistic and independent radio with its continued and overwhelming dependence on English and its insensitivity to the country's native languages, this article attempts to put the debate about the relationship between Africa's native languages and its emerging pluralistic broadcasting systems on public and scholarly agendas. More importantly, it raises the following significant, yet unaddressed, questions that are applicable to other emerging democratic African nations reforming their broadcasting systems: Why is Africa's emerging independent broadcast, particularly radio, not promoting the predominant use of more widely spoken native languages in broadcast? What implications does the continued dependence on Euro-imperial languages in Africa's contemporary broadcast have on the development of a true African broadcast identity? To what extent should the emerging independent plural radio reflect national cultures and languages?

Using results from audience survey data (n=408) as well as in-depth interviews with Ghanaian broadcasters, government officials, media scholars and journalists that was gathered in Ghana's capital Accra from 1998 to 2002 and 2005, this article makes the following arguments. First, though the emerging independent and private radio have provided channel and program diversity, they have failed to reflect and promote their society's cultures and native languages. Second, insensitivity to their society's native languages and local cultural products is a consequence of the erroneous view of broadcasters that the public has a 'need for entertainment and pleasure' (Senghor 1996:97), which can be met by airing more foreign programs, broadcasting with foreign languages, and in some cases, mimicking foreign accents. Third, a culturally appropriate and true African radio broadcast can develop only if broadcasters and media policy makers develop deliberate policies to encourage the use of widely spoken native languages and promote local cultures and talents; something they have not paid attention to as they reform their public broadcasting. Such policies would ensure the ability of emerging pluralistic radio to communicate with the majority of the populace and encourage participation in civic discourse in discernible languages. Finally, this paper calls on African broadcasters, media scholars and policy makers to re-examine the overwhelming dependence on Euro-imperial languages for broadcasting.

### **Language and culture in national broadcasting reforms**

The centrality of language and culture in national broadcasting reforms has been extensively researched in the United States and Europe (Grant 1994; Owen 1977; Schudson 1994; Thomsen 1989) and Asia (Kamin 1996; Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). On the contrary, very little research has been done on similar broadcasting issues in sub-Saharan Africa (Leonard 1996). Arguably, language and culture are the most visible and most problematic forces for societal integration. Schudson argued, 'Culture, that is, the way of life of a society, brings individuals and families of varying circumstances and backgrounds together in a collectivity with which people may strongly identify, take primary meanings from, and find emotionally satisfying' (1994:64). Likewise, the importance of language in any society can scarcely be overestimated. According to Anderson, 'The fatality of human linguistic diversity' has strongly guided the formation of nation states (1983:46).

By origin, practice and convention, broadcasting systems are very much national institutions that respond to cultural, domestic, political and social pressures and to the expectations of their audiences (McQuail 1993). Ugboajah (1985) argued that the structure and content of broadcasting systems should reflect the cultural character of the societies within which they operate. Thomsen (1989) also noted that as broadcasting systems become pluralized they cease to reflect the culture and the circumstances of their intended publics and may even undermine local language and cultural identity as a result of the transnational flow of content. Similarly, theories dealing with cultural integrity and imperialism typically have been concerned with matters of cultural quality of the media's content, its authenticity in real life experiences and the cultural task of broadcasting. Underlying these theoretical positions is a strong belief that languages and cultures are both valuable collective properties of nations and vulnerable to alien influences (McQuail 1993). Throughout the history of broadcasting development, we see these ideas deeply rooted in arguments for protecting national languages and cultural identities.

Strong cultural reasoning has permeated broadcast policy formulation, content and structure in Europe and North America since the 1940s. Discussions about language problems by parties representing regional and cultural interests were pivotal in broadcast reforms in many Western countries. European media scholars (Drijvers 1992; Schlesinger 1991) have argued that public service broadcasting was conceived of as a 'cultural lever' in the hands of European states for the defense of their national cultures. On the national level, they argued, public service broadcasting



sought to unite nations by ignoring local and regional differences and by presenting a unified national culture. On the international level, they sought to defend national cultures against the growing threat of internationalization (Blanco and Bulck 1995).

Belgium, Spain and Canada offer solid examples of the extent to which broadcasting language was a political and cultural matter. In Belgium and Spain, cultural and language concerns in broadcasting led to the development of independent Flemish-speaking and French-speaking channels, respectively. It also led to the creation of separate 'cultural councils' responsible for 'cultural matters' in the Flemish-speaking and French-speaking communities and to the creation of regional broadcasting (Blanco and Bulck 1995:245). In Canada, broadcasting began as an effort to assert cultural autonomy against the hegemony of the United States and to 'create a national consciousness' (Schudson 1994:74).

During the 1980s, several Asian countries also began to reform their public broadcasting systems by introducing commercial and pluralistic broadcasting (Straubhaar 1995; White 1996). As part of the reforms, Asian broadcasters and government officials made deliberate policies to ensure that broadcast pluralism would promote program diversity without sacrificing individual national cultures and languages (Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). In Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore, for instance, safeguards were made to ensure that national cultures were protected from foreign influences. A regional broadcasting union, Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) was created to ensure that national cultures, languages and local programming were protected and promoted as private and independent broadcasting developed alongside public broadcasting (Kamin 1996).

Unlike in Europe or Asia, African policies to protect and promote native languages and cultures in broadcast reforms are woefully inadequate or totally absent though the role of culture and language as integrating factors is clearly evident in many African societies. African societies have developed historically and continue to exist on the basis of strong cultural, linguistic and ethnic bonds. Many nations self-consciously use language policy and mass media to integrate citizens and ensure their loyalty (Tomlinson 1991). Nonetheless, African broadcasters have typically employed French or English, the languages of their former colonizers, for both official communications and broadcasting.

Prior to handing over political governance to African native administrators in the 1960s, however, efforts were made in some countries to indigenize broadcasting. Native broadcasters, administrators and

technicians were trained to take over from departing expatriates (UNESCO 1961). Immediately following independence, African governments recognized that in order to realize national and rural development goals and to reach the majority rural peasant population, radio broadcasting should accommodate native languages and cultural differences.

Thus, in the 1960s, some governments began to introduce native languages for radio broadcasting. For instance, in Zambia where there were about twenty major languages spoken by seventy-three ethnic groups, time was allocated to seven native languages in proportion to the size of language communities in the nation (Mytton 1983). Following President Kenneth Kaunda's tribal balancing policy instituted upon Zambia's independence, broadcasts in a variety of native languages including Bemba and Nyanja were added to English in 1967. In the mid-1980s, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale and Tonga were allocated broadcasting time. In 1988, however, all Zambian languages were removed from the general radio service. By 1990, Zambia's Radio 2 and Radio 4 were broadcasting only in English. Seven Zambian languages shared equal airtime on Radio 1, although the languages representing the largest groups of people received the best times of day for broadcasting (Spitulnik 1992). Similarly in Kenya, the Voice of Kenya (now the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation) used English to transmit its General Service program and Swahili for the National Service program. In addition, broadcasting time in three Kenyan regional services was shared by sixteen native languages (Heath 1986).

### **Indigenizing radio broadcasting in Ghana**

In 1935, British administrators introduced radio into Ghana. Despite the fact that Ghana had about seventy-nine living native languages (UNESCO 1989), all radio programs were broadcast in English, the national and official language. However, British administrators soon realized that radio broadcasting in Ghana must use vernacular languages if its programs were to be understood by the natives. So in 1939, colonial administrators began introducing Ghanaian languages and personnel into radio broadcasting. Ghana Radio began to broadcast in Ewe, Twi and Hausa local languages. Two other languages, Ga and Dagbani, were added during the 1940s (Ansah 1979; Kugblenu 1974). By 1960 the state broadcasting system, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), was using fifteen of the seventy-nine native languages to broadcast different national and regional programs throughout the country (Ansah 1979). The ethnic languages used for national programs included Asante/Akuapim Twi, Fante, Ewe, Hausa, Ga-

Adangbe, Nzema, Dagbani, Dagaari and Kasem. Those used to air the government's non-formal radio education programs in the Northern and Upper regions of the country were Frafra, Buli, Kusaal, Sisaala and Gonja (UNESCO 1989).

The indigenizing of Ghana's broadcasting intensified during the post-colonial period and well into the 1970s. The post-independence government of Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) reiterated the importance of broadcasting in consolidating the new nation. In the early 1960s, the government with the support of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched development plans intended to expand radio broadcasting to rural areas (UNESCO 1968). Educational radio was established to promote rural education and development. Radio listening clubs in native languages were also established to increase awareness among rural peasants of the new government and its development plans (Coleman and Opoku 1968). Tudesq (1983) has explained how the use of mass media, particularly radio, for development was a highly salable idea in the 1960s. The idea of rural radio broadcasting in native languages appealed to the new elites in the newly independent Ghana, because radio permitted the elites and government to communicate directly to the majority rural peasants and to re-orient them toward the central government and its policies. However, critics have argued that the Nkrumah government's efforts to indigenize broadcasting and to establish rural radio projects in native languages were propaganda plots intended to politically sensitize the rural populations (Ansah 1979, 1988; Coleman and Opoku 1968).

By the late 1960s, the novelty of rural radio broadcasts had begun to wear off. As more and more Ghanaians acquired radio sets, interest in group listening began to wane. Many of the rural radio projects began to fail due to poor conceptualization and implementation. For instance, some adult literacy programs were ill-received by adult audiences who objected to literacy lessons originally designed for school children (Coleman and Opoku 1968). In addition, most of the early rural radio projects were insufficiently integrated into the existing national broadcasting services. Consequently, the government abandoned most of the rural radio services.

Nonetheless, radio broadcasting continued to expand, albeit slowly, in the 1970s and 1980s, because it was too important a tool to be ignored. In the 1980s, GBC increased its radio transmitters for its regional FM services. The transmitters were provided through bilateral aid in support of rural-based community education projects (Amakyi 1988). During the same period, GBC also focused on using native languages and programs in its

regional FM services. A UNESCO (1989) survey of the broadcasting content of Ghana from 1975 to 1988 revealed that news bulletins produced originally in English were increasingly translated into rural languages. By the late 1970s, news on GBC Radio was translated into six native languages—Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, Ga, Nzema and Hausa (Ansah 1979). At the time, news represented nearly 50 percent of radio broadcasting. The UNESCO (1989) survey on Ghana showed that cultural programs dealing with traditional Ghanaian festivals and folklore represented less than 15 percent of broadcast time in the 1980s; that educational programs occupied about 20 percent of radio broadcast time; that religious broadcasting by major Christian and Muslim groups averaged less than 5 percent of broadcast schedules; and that advertisements instituted to help stem budget deficits averaged 2 percent of broadcast time.

The development of radio broadcasting in Ghana has not occurred in a smooth political environment. In the early 1960s, political pressures began to mount against President Nkrumah and his CPP government as the population increasingly showed their disappointments in the unfulfilled promises of the early post-independence era. The government began to find means to curb media access and to consolidate power through repeater stations that disseminated messages from the capital cities where broadcasting could be more carefully monitored and controlled. Ultimately, a pattern emerged in Ghana that favored direct government control of broadcasting and the use of broadcasting to disseminate government propaganda (Ansah 1985; Bourgault 1995). By the 1970s, the state-owned GBC was firmly under control of the government. This control and GBC's monopoly were broken in 1995 when the erstwhile government of Jerry Rawlings and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) liberalized the Ghanaian economy and allowed for broadcast pluralism and privatization.

### **Private radio broadcasting**

In the mid 1990s, Ghana, like many African countries, was confronted by many significant changes politically, economically and socially. The government embarked on a serious goal of establishing a democratic, liberal and free market economy (Gyimah-Boadi 1999). The changes brought about a process of democratization and pluralism, decentralization of economic and political decision-making, and the encouragement of the private sector to take over many functions previously undertaken by the state. In the process, Ghana's public broadcast system came under intense criticisms and ultimately reform as a result of external and internal pressures.

Externally, the reform was associated with a new era of political pluralism and neo-liberal economic policies that swept across sub-Saharan Africa in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union. After decades of state control and limited choice of media, liberal rhetoric that associated democracy with private media and a free market was attractive to both the general public and business community (Heath 1999, 2001). In addition, pressure was exerted from international donor agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, which had made democratic and liberal reform a condition for continued external loans (Gyimah-Boadi 1999).

Internal pressure came mainly from the Ghanaian academic community in the form of organized conferences that aimed at putting democracy and media liberalization on the public agenda (School of Communication Studies 1993). For example, at a conference organized by the Unda/OCIC (International Catholic Organization for Cinema and Audiovisual) in Accra on September 6, 1992, the academic community recognized a change in government attitude towards the media. In a speech delivered at the opening ceremony, the Information Minister of Ghana declared a major policy change:

the political changes taking place on the continent are likely to lead to the review of state monopoly in the electronic media. We in Ghana have, within the framework of our national communication policy, proposed a degree of deregulation in the electronic media set within clearly defined guidelines (Bonnah-Koomson 1994:85).

This official policy declaration signaled a change in the attitude of Rawlings and the NDC government. It also inspired the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana to organize two conferences on broadcast pluralism and privatization. The conferences, held in March 1993 and November 1994, highlighted the need for broadcast pluralism and publicly criticized the government for its disregard of the constitutional rights of Ghanaians by not allowing for press freedom and independent broadcasting as guaranteed by the 1992 Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana (Bonnah-Koomson 1995). Article 162 of the 1992 Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression and eliminated the need to obtain licensing for the operation of any medium of mass communication, including radio and television. It stated:

There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a

newspaper, journal, or other media for mass communication or information (Republic of Ghana 1992:3).

The conferences also set a public agenda around arguments for and against the introduction of independent and private broadcasting in Ghana. Proponents urging constitutional rights and broadcast liberalization, who were mainly from the academic community, argued that independent broadcasting was needed to assure genuine pluralism, social development and national unity. They further claimed that broadcast pluralism would promote program diversity and competition as well as encourage the development and use of Ghanaian cultural products and languages. But those opposed to broadcast pluralism, mainly government officials, invoked a cultural argument and expressed concern about the negative effects commercial broadcasting could have on Ghana's culture, local talents and native languages (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1995; Bonnah-Koomson 1995; Heath 1999; Karikari 1994).

Nevertheless, in 1995 the NDC government reluctantly authorized private ownership and operation of broadcasting (Blankson 2000; Heath 1999, 2001). This action broke the decades of monopoly enjoyed by the state-owned GBC and set a pace for the establishment of independent private radio in Ghana. By 2005, the number of new private FM radio stations operating alongside the two state-owned stations GBC 1 (Radio 1) and GBC 2 (Radio 2) increased from zero to fifty-seven. Of these FM radio stations, twenty-nine and fifteen were in the two major regional capitals of Accra and Kumasi respectively. The other thirteen stations were operating in other regional centers. The FM radio stations in Accra included Joy FM, Radio Gold, Radio Univers, Choice FM, Radio Atlantis, Groove FM, Radio Vibe, Peace FM, Channel R and Radio GAR, owned by Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. Those in Kumasi included Spirit FM, Zuria FM, Radio Mercury, GCR FM, Kessben FM, Nkosuo FM, Mett FM, Kapital FM, Fox FM, Luv FM, Ashh FM, Hello FM, Otec FM, Invisible FM and Focus FM.

These private stations began to provide channel and program diversity for the first time in Ghana's history. However, the stations were very similar in many ways and followed almost the same broadcast format. Music, particularly Western and Caribbean, interjected with talk accounted for between 75 and 80 percent of the radio airtime (Blankson 2000). Though the radio stations played a number of 'hip-life' (a Ghanaian version of rap music), noticeably absent were traditional Ghanaian folk music, such as 'boboobo' and 'kpalongo', and guitar music or 'highlife'. The GBC continued to be the primary source of local and foreign news. Some of the

private radio stations, however, retransmitted foreign or world news through exchanges with international stations such as the Voice of America (VOA), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio Netherlands. Almost all stations aired their local and foreign news in English. Besides music and the news segments, the stations introduced a variety of interactive phone-in or talk programs that actively engaged the public. These programs addressed a wide range of social, health, environmental and political issues. Other programs engaged in mobilizing citizens for community work. Despite the diverse, interactive and entertaining content of the emerging radio stations, their overwhelming dependence on English and their relatively limited use of Ghanaian native languages and cultural programs are issues that need to be addressed.

### **Insensitivity of radio to Ghanaian culture and languages**

Ghana has about seventy-nine native languages; however, English has been the predominant language for broadcasting since the colonial period. Though the colonial government introduced native languages into broadcasting, a policy continued by the immediate post-colonial government, the predominance of English and its possible effects on native language use in broadcasting were ignored. When broadcasting pluralism became a reality in 1995 and more vibrant and competitive commercial radio stations emerged for the first time in Ghana's history, Ghanaians hoped that their native languages and cultural talents would be promoted and utilized by the new radio stations. On the contrary, the emerging radio stations opted to broadcast solely in English. Both public and private radio stations neglected to use any of the country's seventy-nine native languages solely or predominantly to air their programs. Ghana's radio environment began to experience what the former Deputy Minister of Communication, Commander Griffith, described as the 'foreignization' of Ghana's radio broadcasting. The Minister observed that some of the radio stations, particularly Vibe FM, were so dominated by English when they started broadcasting that listeners phoned in to inquire whether the stations were foreign (Griffith, pers. comm., October 22, 1999).

By late 2000 none of the Accra radio stations was broadcasting solely or predominantly in any Ghanaian native language. However, in response to public criticism, some stations began to develop and air one or two programs in a native language. Stations like Radio GAR, Radio One, Radio Two, Joy FM, Radio Gold, Peace FM and Radio Univers began re-broadcasting their news bulletins in either Twi or Ewe. Between 1995 and 2000, all of the stations that had developed audience participation programs

used predominantly English. Early in 1997, the University of Ghana station, Radio Univers, successfully introduced a Twi talk program, 'Obiara Nka Bi'. Following its success, Radio GAR developed an Akan talk program called 'Agoro Na Me Pe' that received public acclaim. Others such as Vibe FM, Groove FM and Joy FM followed the successful lead provided by Radio Univers and introduced similar audience participation programs that actively engaged the public using native languages.

Radio Gold, for instance, developed an Akan program that discussed Akan culture and traditions. By late 2001, Peace FM and Radio Gold had begun to air their news in English and two native languages, Twi and Ga, in response to public criticism. Radio Gold and Joy FM also started airing some of their phone-in programs in Twi. While the phone-in program format required the program host to be multilingual in order to understand callers, the host spoke only in English. This format also required that listeners have the ability to comprehend what the host said in English. The state-owned Radio GAR did not have an audience participation program aired exclusively in any of the Ghanaian languages until mid-2001, even though its policy guidelines called for 80 percent of programming in vernacular languages. The public expectation that emerging radio stations would encourage the use of Ghanaian native languages in broadcasting was, however, thrown into question.

### **Culturally appropriate language in broadcasting reforms**

The emerging cultural and linguistic character of radio broadcasting in Ghana, and many other African societies, raises important questions. Does the emerging character of radio pose a threat to the cultures and languages of the societies within which they operate? Is there a culturally appropriate broadcast language in multilingual African societies? Is there a justification for the continued overwhelming reliance on Euro-imperial languages in Africa's radio? Or does such dependency prevent the development and use of native languages in broadcasting?

The importance of national languages in broadcasting systems globally cannot be disputed except in Africa where broadcasting relies heavily on foreign languages. This raises concern over the effects that continued dependence on foreign languages have on the continent's emerging broadcasting systems, particularly radio. Schudson (1994) reminded us that language is itself the fundamental human mass medium. It is the mass medium through which all other media speak. No other medium is so deeply rooted, so emotionally fraught, so insistently the basis for political aspirations, or so much an impediment to the efforts of states to use modern



media for hegemonic control. Thus, in Africa, as in other societies, the use of a native language should not be seen as a neutral medium for communication but a highly charged cultural object to be harnessed for development and civic participation. How has this characterization of language played out in African broadcasting systems?

Some media critics, including Senghor, have charged that the emerging private stations have become 'Trojan horses of Anglo-Saxon culture and music and, thus, for hastening the disintegration of local cultures' (Senghor 1996:97). Senghor (1996), for instance, claimed that the success enjoyed by radio stations bears witness to listeners' demands and needs for entertainment and pleasure, something that the state-run stations did not know how to address. However, evidence from Ghana, Burkina Faso and several other African societies does not support Senghor's claim. In Ghana, radio stations had become competitive grounds where program hosts and news readers prove who could speak with the best foreign accent. A phenomenon known in Ghanaian popular culture as LAFA (Locally Acquired Foreign Accent) emerged whereby program presenters and hosts, who had never traveled to the United States or the Caribbean, were mimicking American and Caribbean accents. In their attempt to do so, they mispronounced common Ghanaian names and words. Not surprisingly, Ghanaian youth picked up on it and began to mimic foreign accents and American slang (Blankson 2000).

The emergence of LAFA in private radio and popular culture has caused Ghanaians to question whether broadcast pluralism had become a recipe for corroding indigenous Ghanaian languages and ways of speaking. In my interview with Major Tandoh, the Executive Director of Ghana Radio Frequency Distribution and Registration Board (GRFDRB), he expressed the sentiment held by government officials when he stated:

I call it [LAFA] foreignization of broadcasting. People try to sound foreign. As an apostle of freedom of expression, I would refrain from commenting on whether this is a good style of broadcasting or not. Individuals should be allowed to make up their minds on this matter. The radio stations have their own policies and procedures. For example, a radio station like Radio Gold does not permit their DJs to use nick-names as well as present their material in any foreign accent. That is the policy of the station. Everyone has a constitutional right and I would say the use of foreign accent has no effect on the content of the matter being broadcast. However, being a Ghanaian I would prefer that the presenters use the Ghanaian accent and conduct themselves as Ghanaians (Tandoh, pers. comm., November 15, 1999).

Several of the broadcasters, government officials and media scholars interviewed agreed that majority of the public dislike LAFA in radio. They also believed that LAFA was fueled by the Ghanaian youth. The audience members surveyed confirmed this belief. While 55 percent of the radio audience (n=408) indicated a dislike for foreign accents in private radio, only 33 percent liked the presenters mimicking foreign accents. The remaining 12 percent were indifferent. Furthermore, of the 132 respondents who liked LAFA in radio, 77 percent were between the ages of twenty and thirty, 11 percent were under twenty, and 12 percent were above forty. In contrast, 62 percent of the 224 respondents who disliked the use of foreign accents in broadcasting were 30 years or older. The popularity of LAFA in private radio can be explained by the fact that the majority of the presenters, newsreaders and disc jockeys are under thirty years old and find the use of foreign accents as a 'status-booster'. As one interviewee explained, the young radio presenters and the Ghanaian youth have embraced LAFA as a 'hip' or 'cool' thing (Blankson 2000).

The emergence of foreign accents in radio is not unique to Ghana. Similar language developments have been reported in other emerging African democracies that have privatized their media systems. In Swahili-speaking East African nations such as Kenya, the development of a new language, Swahili mixed with English, is used by the media and most people (Kupe 2002). Similarly, in French-speaking African countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Gabon, 'Franglais' has emerged from the proliferation of private commercial media (Kouega 1999). Also in Burkina Faso, Horizon FM's musical programs, mostly reggae, rock and pop, were hosted by a disc jockey who spoke in a jargon of 'franglais' and wore a baseball cap (Senghor 1996:97). Franglais (or Frenglish) is created by mixing French and American English together. It is produced either by poor knowledge of one or the other language or for humorous effect.

Despite these troubling developments, some contemporary African private broadcasters and media scholars have refused to acknowledge the negative effects these developments have had on their society's languages and on broadcast professionalism in general. Perhaps, African private and commercial broadcasters should begin to acknowledge that they have the obligation, as do public broadcasters, to protect and promote their society's native languages and harness them to encourage more public participation in the media.

Like their African counterparts, Ghana's radio broadcasters have downplayed the importance of local languages. Their insensitivity to native languages has contributed to the erosion of early post-independence efforts

in the 1960s and 1970s to indigenize broadcasting. This observation raises the critical question of what constitutes an appropriate broadcast language, if any, in developing African democracies that are in the process of reforming their broadcasting systems. This question is made more critical because it is asked in the context of societies that are multilingual and that have depended on Euro-imperial languages for decades, languages that are unintelligible to over half of their populations.

Interestingly, some Western media scholars have defended the predominant use of Euro-imperial languages as the most appropriate broadcast languages in African societies. For example, Spitulnik (1992) argued that English and French are the only languages that are 'ethnically neutral' and, thus, non-native to the indigenous ethnic groups. He also claimed that English or French have become the predominant broadcast language of choice in countries colonized by Britain or France in order to resolve competition among linguistic groups. Unfortunately, these arguments have been used successfully to discourage African broadcasters and policy makers from promoting the development of their widely spoken native languages in broadcasting. Some African broadcasters and media scholars are convinced that Africa's diverse native languages do not serve broadcasting institutions well since minority languages are excluded (Senghor 1996). Senegal, for example, uses six of its twelve spoken native languages to broadcast radio programs. Senghor (1996) argued that the exclusive use of widely spoken local languages on national radio excludes linguistic minorities from the audience. She further claimed that in broadcasting systems where several local languages are used, the dominant local language, meaning that of the largest population group or that of the most powerful social group, tends to overshadow the other languages. Therefore, she cautioned, 'Imagine the situation in other African states, with their multitude of languages' (Senghor 1996:85).

Unfortunately, this negative view towards the use of native languages in Africa's broadcasting is shared by many broadcasters and media policy makers in Africa. This view has affected African broadcasting development in two significant ways. First, for decades it succeeded as a valid justification for efforts to deepen what Mazrui called the 'domestication of Euro-imperial languages' in African broadcasting (1996:4). And second, it succeeded in discouraging legitimate attempts to promote the use of more widely spoken native languages in broadcasting on the grounds that using a native language would exclude other linguistic minorities from the audience. But how valid or legitimate are these arguments? Those who hold such a negative view towards native language use in broadcasting fail to realize that these

arguments can also be used against the use of English or French in African societies. The case of Ghana, though not unique in Africa, provides a good illustration. In Ghana, Akan is spoken by 44 percent of the over 19 million Ghanaians (Akan Dictionary Project 2001; Nkansah-Kyeremateng 1996), while functional English is spoken by only 36 percent of the total population (UNESCO 1996).

The argument is also supported by the results of the survey of radio listeners in Accra. Out of the 408 radio listeners following discussions on phone-in talk programs, nearly 75 percent attributed the primary reason for never contributing to the phone-in discussions on radio to their inability to speak good English for fear of making mistakes. The majority of those who phoned-in were regular contributors to the phone-in programs. Yet over 85 percent of Ghanaian broadcasters and media scholars interviewed continue to believe that the use of a native language like Akan for broadcasting would exclude more linguistic minorities from the audience. It is obvious that the use of English in Ghana's radio actually excludes more minorities, including the majority of the 65 percent rural peasant population, from participating in radio broadcasting. According to UNESCO (1996), over 60 percent of Ghanaians were illiterate in 1996; literacy rate was 36 percent. It is quite obvious that the majority of Ghanaians do not and cannot use English to participate effectively in civic discourse on radio.

Evidence from Ghana, Nigeria, Namibia, Mali and other countries suggests that African radio audiences actually prefer programs aired in their native languages over those aired in the languages of their former colonizers (Abdulkadir 2000; Blankson 2000; Kouega 1999; Kupe 2002). Audiences also feel more comfortable participating in programs that are broadcast in a native language. In Ghana, for instance, my investigation revealed that the most popular programs were not the 'entertaining and pleasurable' musical programs claimed by Senghor (1996:97). Rather, the interactive programs that engaged the audience in discussions on social, health, economic and even political issues in one or two native languages were the most popular (Blankson 2000). Over 88 percent of the radio-listening audience surveyed (n=408) attributed the popularity of stations like Joy FM, Radio Gold and Radio GAR to their interactive talk programs in ethnic Akan languages. Radio Univers particularly attracted listeners with its educational programs, news bulletins and press reviews in Ewe and Twi. It was no surprise that over 65 percent of the audience surveyed disliked the predominant use of English on the radio airwaves. The majority considered the dominance of English as a hindrance to both the promotion of Ghana's native languages and the participation of many Ghanaians in

radio discussions. Only 28 percent of those surveyed considered English an appropriate language for radio broadcasting. To justify their response, these people cited the country's multilingual character and the neutrality of English language with regard to ethnic boundaries.

Evidence of the preference for native language programs over programs aired in foreign languages exists in other African countries (Abdulkadir 2000; Fardon and Furniss 2000; Gratz 2000; Reporters Without Borders 2005). Abdulkadir (2000), for instance, noted the popularity of Hausa programs on radio stations in Nigeria. Senghor (1996) acknowledged that the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation's popularity since its transformation in 1993 was the result of the successful interactive programs it had developed in various national languages to encourage open public debate among Namibians and their leaders. The programs were broadcast via satellite over a larger area to reflect the country's multicultural nature. Similarly in Mali, Radio Bamakan began broadcasting in September 1991 without authorization and immediately aroused the enthusiasm of the people of Bamako, because the station translated simultaneously into the local language, Bamanan, the democratically elected parliament's debates which were conducted in French, a language that less than 30 percent of the people of Bamako understood. It even broadcast a weekly review of the national and international press in Bamanan with equal success (Senghor 1996). Finally, the popular Senegalese station Sud FM exhibited considerable multilingualism, so that it was common to hear a listener, as well as the host, switch languages in one and the same show.

Unfortunately, many contemporary African broadcasters and media scholars have confused what they perceived as the audience's need for entertainment and pleasure with foreign programming and the use of foreign languages and accents. Others have even characterized Africa's emerging radio as a factor of cultural change, because radio broadcasts not only record, preserve and file traditions particular to the territory, land or community in which they broadcast, but also they manage to create or encourage the creation of new and popular verbal or musical forms (Senghor 1996). Furthermore, Senghor has argued, 'By preserving and creating local popular culture, radio stations succeed where the state and the elitist civil society of experts and intellectuals seem to have failed' (Senghor 1996:81).

Though these characterizations are interesting, my research in Ghana suggests otherwise. In Ghana the overwhelming majority of radio stations have not succeeded in appropriating, preserving or creating cultural forms and languages indigenous to the people. Rather, they have collectively succeeded in fortifying the domination of English over native languages

and in mimicking foreign accents at the expense of broadcast professionalism. Though it is important to acknowledge the positive developments associated with the emerging radio stations as pointed out by Senghor (1996), it is equally important to critically examine their failures, especially as it relates to the use and promotion of native languages in broadcasting. After all, this is one of the major arguments raised to support the development of independent media in many African countries, including Ghana (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1995; Bonnah-Koomson 1994, 1995). In a sense, what African societies need is a broadcasting environment that would provide multiple forums for its people to freely engage each other in languages that the majority, if not all, would understand and feel comfortable with. African societies also need a broadcasting environment that recognizes the importance of local languages and thus protects and promotes their culture and languages, something that Africa's emerging private radio collectively has failed to do.

### **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly in Ghana and other parts of Africa, radio broadcasting is more competitive and diverse in terms of program and channel choice than it has been historically. Radio broadcasting has become an entrée into civic discourse and socio-political awareness. It has also become a powerful force for social and political integration. Through the efforts of private radio, politics has become nationalized and civic discussions on various issues intensified. But on a more critical level, Africa's emerging radio stations have become avenues for corroding their society's languages and cultures. While they have collectively been insensitive to their native languages and cultural talents, they have been successful in domesticating English and Western broadcast content. Thus, for Africa's broadcasting to be useful to the majority of its people and for it to develop an identity of its own, the language and cultural policy question must be seriously addressed.

Clearly, what is happening in broadcasting is a reflection of African governments' failure to provide broadcast policies that seek to protect cultural integrity and promote native languages. It is also a consequence of the negative views broadcasters and media scholars have on the multilingual character of African societies, especially as it relates to broadcasting. Thus, African private and public broadcasters should have a mandate to protect and promote their society's cultures and languages. This is important because culture is a means of communication that provides language for meaningful interactions (Mazrui 1996). The potential of

indigenous African languages as cultural expressions and identity formation cannot be overlooked by media policy makers in this critical time of broadcast transformation. Contemporary African broadcasters cannot continue to rely overwhelmingly on Euro-imperial languages for their discourse if they hope to engage the majority of the people.

It is even doubtful that a 'true' African broadcasting system would emerge if it continues to be so tightly held hostage to the languages of former colonial powers. Mazrui reminded us that 'no country has ascended to the level of economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages' (1996:4). The claim that broadcast pluralism and independence in emerging African democracies would automatically encourage the growth of local cultures and the use of native languages cannot be realized unless private broadcasters realize they have the same obligation as public broadcasters to promote the culture and languages of the societies within which they operate. A true African broadcast identity can be realized only if emerging African democracies reforming their broadcasting systems towards commercialism develop deliberate policies to promote their native languages and cultures. African broadcasters and media policy makers should be mindful of the experiences of Asian countries where deliberate language and cultural policies successfully guided broadcast reforms and protected Asian languages from domination of Western languages and cultural products (Lee and Youn 1995; Servaes and Wang 1997). As media scholars concerned with the cultural and linguistic direction of Africa's broadcasting systems, we cannot but raise these issues at a critical time when African broadcasting is at its early stages of transformation towards pluralism and privatization.

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## Reaching Critical Mass in Nigeria's Telephone Industry

Chuka Onwumechili\*

### Abstract

The sudden and rapid growth in access to telephones in Nigeria has certainly raised major questions for telecommunications scholars. Access to telephones in Nigeria had been marginal by the end of the twentieth century with the teledensity rate well below 1:100 for a country of estimated 130 million persons (Ajayi, Salawu and Raji 1999). Today, over 10 million Nigerians have access, improving the teledensity to 13:100 in barely five years! Growth rates are currently over 100 percent per year. What happened? How was the industry turned around? Has critical mass been reached? Has the rate of growth become self-sustaining? This paper explores all the above questions using the theory of critical mass as the framework for analysis. It concludes that a critical mass of users has been built in the urban centers and that access is rapidly approaching the saturation point. In addition, it argues that much more needs to be done in order to achieve similar growth rates in the rural areas.

**Key Terms:** Telephone, telecommunication, teledensity, critical mass, Nigeria

### Résumé

La brusque et rapide croissance au niveau de l'accès téléphonique au Nigeria soulève des questions cruciales à l'endroit des universitaires des télécommunications. L'accès aux téléphones dans ce pays est demeuré plutôt marginal vers la fin du vingtième siècle, avec un taux de télé densité bien en deçà des 1 : 100 pour un pays d'environ 130 millions d'habitants (Ajayi, Salawu et Raji 1999). Aujourd'hui, environ 10 millions de Nigériens ont accès au téléphone, augmentant ainsi la télé densité à 13:100 en à peine cinq ans ! Les taux de croissance dépassent actuellement les 100 pour cent par an. Que s'est-il donc passé ? Comment expliquer ce revirement dans l'industrie du téléphone ? Est-ce qu'une

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\* Chuka Onwumechili is Professor and Chair, Department of Communications, Bowie State University, Bowie, Maryland, USA. Direct all correspondence regarding manuscript to: Department of Communications, Bowie State University, 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie, MD 20715. Email: COnwumechili@Bowiestate.edu

masse critique a pu être atteinte ? Le taux de croissance peut-il se maintenir ? Cet article analyse toutes ces questions en se servant de la théorie de la masse critique comme cadre d'analyse. L'auteur conclut qu'une masse critique d'utilisateurs a été constituée dans les centres urbains et que l'accès serait même proche du point de saturation. En outre, l'article révèle que beaucoup d'efforts restent à faire, afin de réaliser le même taux de croissance dans les zones rurales.

**Mots clés:** Télécommunications, téléphone, accès aux réseaux de télécommunications, Nigéria

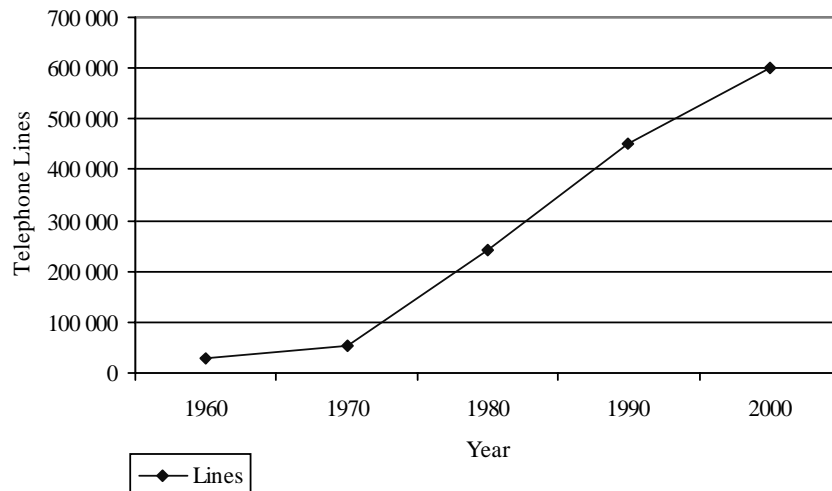
### **Introduction**

The sudden and rapid growth in access to telephones in Nigeria has certainly raised major questions for telecommunications scholars. Access to telephones in Nigeria had been marginal by the end of the last century with the teledensity rate well below 1:100 for a country of estimated 130 million persons (Ajayi, Salawu and Raji 1999). At the time, mobile telephony was largely non-existent and the population growth was quickly outstripping the growth of new fixed lines. There were serious concerns that access to telephony would not come easy and achieving a critical mass of users was therefore considered difficult. Reasons presented for this challenge included the fact that the average income in the country was below poverty level, the cost of service was expensive, and the national provider was barely surviving. Today, over 10 million Nigerians have access, a number that has raised the teledensity level to 13:100 in barely five years! Growth rates are currently over 100 percent per year.

What happened? How was the industry turned around? Has critical mass been reached? Has the rate of growth become self-sustaining? This paper explores all the above questions using the theory of critical mass as the framework for analysis. The sections of this paper are designed as follows: first, a brief recap of the industry status prior to the licensing of mobile telephone providers in 2001; second, introducing the theory of critical mass; third, discussing the problems posed by the pre-2001 industry status; fourth, using the theory to shed light into the post-2001 industry status; and finally, asking and attempting to address the question, 'What's next?'

### **Pre-2001 industry status**

The Nigerian telephone industry was largely stagnant prior to 2001. There were two clear phases that defined industry activity during this period. The periods were (a) pre-liberalization period and (b) early liberalization (i.e., liberalization between 1992 and 2001). Figure 1 below provides data of industry growth pre-2001.

**Figure 1: Pre-2001 Industry Growth Rate*****Pre-liberalization***

Nigeria's telephone industry was monopolized by the government during the pre-liberalization period as it was thought that only the government had the funds to develop the nation's telephone infrastructure. The government department that was charged with this task was the Ministry of Communications, and the Ministry carried out the task through its parastatal, the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL).<sup>1</sup>

Prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, telephone access in Nigeria was first developed in 1886 to provide a telecommunications link between British colonial administrators in Nigeria and their home country, Britain (Ajayi, Salawu and Raji 1999). Thus, telephone access was severely limited to these few administrators. At independence, the policy changed to providing telephones to government offices and there were few telephones available in residential homes. The outbreak of a civil war, barely seven years after independence, did not help matters. Nigeria turned its attention to war matters and the growth of telephone access suffered sharply during the war years from 1967 to 1970.

To worsen the matter, budgets for the expansion of telephone lines began to experience frequent shortfalls between the amount budgeted and the funds that were actually released for implementation. This problem created a crises situation where the population growth began to outstrip the introduction of new lines. Furthermore, several of the existing

lines had fallen into disrepair and funds were not being used to resuscitate these lines. Thus, at one time the number of effective lines had fallen from 600,000 to 400,000.

### ***Early liberalization***

The problems in the industry had become a crisis, and the government was being pressured by both internal and external groups to liberalize the industry as a viable solution. Of course, much of the pressure was also due to interest in taking advantage of the business opportunities that follow industry liberalization. Eventually, the military government acceded to the pressures by liberalizing the industry in 1992 and establishing the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). However, this early bid for liberalization was fraught with its own problems.

The biggest problem was that the regulator (i.e., NCC) was headed by administrators who were more willing to capitulate to governmental and elite pressures instead of maintaining a firm regime that focused on the larger public interest and the development of the industry. The result was chaos. Within a few years of NCC's existence, scores of licenses were awarded to all sorts of interests. Several licensees were related to or were acquaintances of government officials (Adekanmbi 1999). Some of the licensees never provided any service and instead resold the licenses for profit. Kubeyinje (1998) reported that the then Chief Executive of NCC, Mr. Ogbonna Iromantu, complained that 'of 150 telecommunications companies licensed so far nationwide, fewer than 20 had provided services to their clients'. In such an environment, very little development took place. The little development that took place was painfully slow as a few of the providers struggled to improve access for Nigerians.

### **Building critical mass and the pre-2001 problems**

Obviously, the problems of the pre-2001 industry status raised the question of whether it was possible to create a critical mass of telephone users in Nigeria. Rogers (1991) has indicated that critical mass in an interactive system, such as a telephone network, refers to the point at which the number of adopters of the system is large enough for the growth of the network to become self-sustaining.

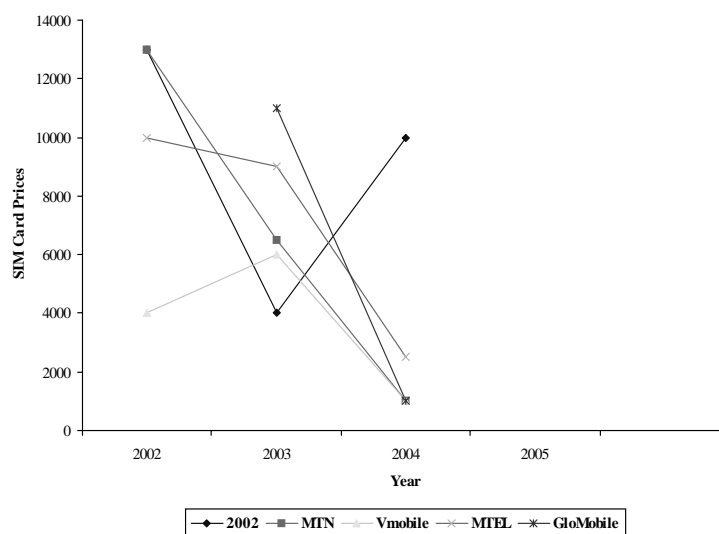
It was Lynne Markus who provided the framework for the theory of critical mass of interactive media in 1990. Before then, there were numerous publications on the concept of critical mass (Granovetter 1978; Hardin 1982; Oliver and Marwell 1988; Oliver, Marwell and Teixeira 1985; Olson 1965). Most of those publications, however, focused on collective actions in the social arena for the public good. Markus (1987, 1990) relies on two

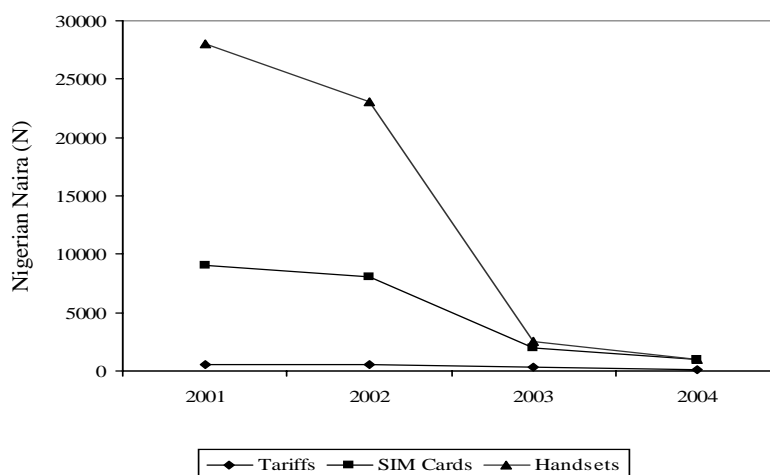
key principles in the explanation for the building of a critical mass: resource contributions and heterogeneity. For resource contributions, Markus refers to users' knowledge of the system, the effort required in the usage of the system, the level of commitment and discipline required of the users of the systems and the cost of the system particularly for the early adopters. Heterogeneity refers to factors such as diversity in users' interests, task interdependence and the geographic dispersion of the users.

Onwumechili (2001) discussed critical mass in telephone access in Nigeria by using the theory to forecast the likelihood of universal access. At that time, he pointed to several obstacles to the building of critical mass of telephone users in Nigeria. Those obstacles were the cost of obtaining the service which then ranged from \$210 to \$526 and was higher than costs for obtaining a similar service in the Western countries, the low per capita income in Nigeria, and the lack of telephone resources in the rural areas. Onwumechili (2001) did acknowledge that the discipline and effort required for building critical mass and the required geographical dispersion of users were already present in Nigeria.

In any case, the telephone industry in Nigeria has undergone dramatic changes since 2001. Some of the key problems that were cited as hindrances to the building of critical mass and the wide extension of telephone services have been largely overcome. For instance, costs have dipped dramatically (see Figures 2a and 2b). The lower costs have come largely from intense market competition.

**Figure 2a:** Decline in SIM Card Price Provider



**Figure 2b: Decline in Prices\***

\* Data representing tariffs are miniscule. However, the data shows a steady decline in tariff from 40 kobo in 2002, 22 kobo in 2003, to 20 kobo per minute in 2004. The exchange rate at the time of writing is \$1 = 13,900 kobo.

The declining cost of access has also impacted the percentage of income required for access. By the 1990s, costs associated with telephone access were so high that Nwankpa (1999) and Wogu (1999) pointed out that the percentage of income that Nigerians used to acquire telephone access was by far higher than the 1.5 to 3 percent obtainable world wide at the time. Thus, the growth in access to telephone, at the time, was logically considered a problem with high cost of access and its effect on incomes. However, that dramatic change with the declining cost has meant that the percentage of income required for access has also declined, thus, increasing the probability of access.

The telephone regulatory system in Nigeria focuses on providing access to urban residents and not to rural residents. Thus, telephone resources are severely limited in the rural areas. Therefore, a calculation of critical mass should focus on the urban centers.

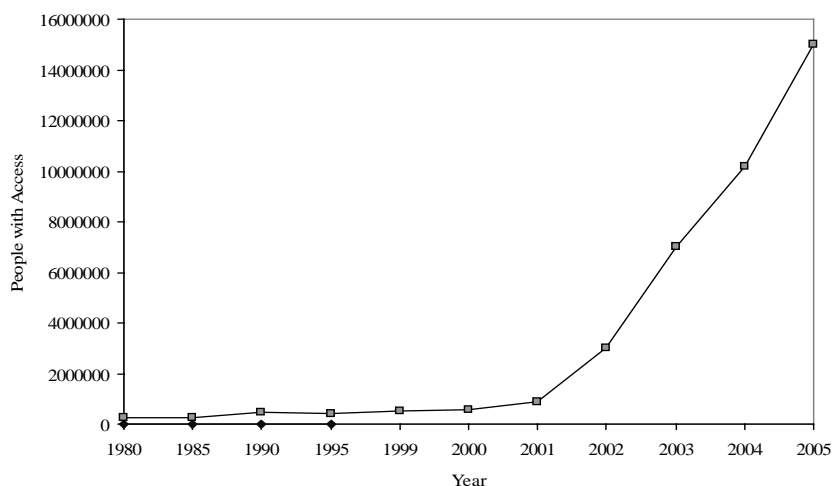
There are other factors that impact the building of critical mass, apart from the downward pressure on costs. As stated earlier, Olson (1965) had noted that a few committed leaders are quite capable of generating collective action of a very large group. In Nigeria's case, the earlier adopters of telephone service were elites because of the high costs. However, as the costs began to decline, a diversity of opinion leaders from other eco-



conomic classes also adopted the medium. For instance, students and low level workers (e.g. auto mechanics, petty traders, among others) were quick to join the early adopters. This meant that the heterogeneity or user diversity predicted by Markus became present in the Nigerian case. Presently, service users include more than opinion leaders or early adopters. The service is now being diffused to their followers or early majority using Rogers' diffusion of innovation model for analysis. Figure 3 shows the beginning of an S-shaped curve as predicted by Rogers (1991). The curve is yet to be fully shaped because the growth has not begun to level off.

So, do the above discussions entail a success in building critical mass? Essentially, yes. It is important to note that we need to categorize Nigeria into two geographical areas of urban and rural in order for us to effectively discuss the building of a critical mass in Nigeria. Critical mass has been reached in the urban centers where the telephone service providers have largely focused their services and marketing. There is a huge potential in the rural areas but the providers are yet to focus their attention on those areas.

**Figure 3:** Diffusion Growth of Telephone

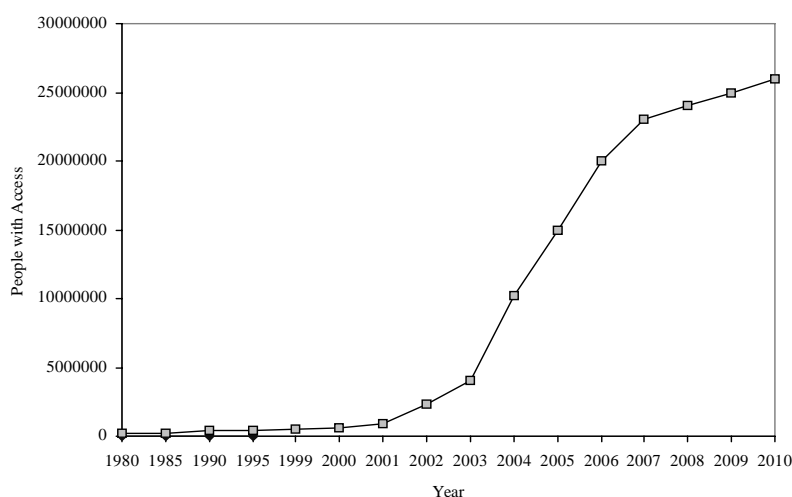


The existence of this critical mass of users, particularly in the urban centers, can be explained by the following: (a) that virtually all calls from existing telephones originate from the urban centers, (b) that the 10 million Nigerians who have access to these telephones represent half of the 23 million adults residing in the urban centers,<sup>2</sup> (c) that the above access constitutes a large reach of households in Nigerian urban centers, and (d) that the

above constitutes a realization of telephone's interactive full benefits or at the very least, its possibility of reaching that full potential within Nigerian urban centers. The interactive benefits are derived through the ubiquity of a large number of friends who belong to a network and their increased ability to comfortably conduct relationships and business over the telephone. This increases the medium's chance of sustainability and encourages the few friends who have not acquired access to do so as later adopters of the medium.

The lowering of costs and the presence of other factors have all helped to build a critical mass of users. As noted earlier, the story is not completely told by lower costs. Instead, the following factors have all been instrumental to the changes with some of them also explaining the lower costs: regulation, competition and aggressive marketing, latent demand, economic/commerce boost and a boisterous informal economy. They have all combined to dramatically increase access to telephone services in Nigeria and, thus, have helped develop a critical mass of users. Rogers (1991) argues that a critical mass of users develops as the number of users reaches a point that is considered large enough to self-sustain the growth of the use of the product. This often can be graphed in an S-shaped curve. The curve in Figure 4 represents the predicted rate of growth by 2010. The factors that have helped to produce a critical mass of users in the Nigerian case have been identified above, and we will proceed to further describe each of them.

**Figure 4:** Predicted Curve of Telephone Diffusion in Nigeria



### **Regulation**

Industry regulation improved dramatically under the democratic government which was elected in 1999. The government immediately found a solution to the chaotic telephone regulation that existed under the NCC of that time. It revoked several of the licenses and appointed a more capable NCC administration.

The changes turned out to be astute. The new NCC under Ernest Ndukwe has been central to the rapid growth in the industry. Among its key successes have been in the areas of creating trust among the public, providers and investors; attracting heavily-capitalized investors; developing the capability of investigating the technical ability of market participants; and, general oversight that is designed to protect the public good in the area of interconnection prices and consumer protection. All those measures have contributed to the building of critical mass.

The new NCC built trust very quickly through its transparent auction of GSM frequencies in 2001 (Onwumechili 2003). It followed its policy to the letter and put down its feet in denying a license to Communications Investments Limited (CIL) after the latter failed to pay the required fees on a preset deadline. NCC failed to budge under political pressures from some legislators and government officials that were sympathetic to CIL. That singular act by NCC immediately bestowed it with the much needed trust from a watching public, providers and both internal and external investors.

Furthermore, the NCC strengthened the requirements for license applicants in order to ensure that companies that are bidding for licenses have substantial financial backing to build the needed infrastructure and to survive initial losses while building up the market. This was not always the case, particularly during the period pre-2001. The new requirements, for instance, led to substantial investment of close to \$300 million in license fees alone paid by each of the licensed GSM providers. The result was that credible providers were immediately made market participants. Today, several banks (local and foreign), Nigerian state governments, foreign investors, international agencies and multilateral institutions provide major capital backing for several of the telephone market participants. For instance, in 2004 Guaranty Trust Bank (GTB) led a consortium of banks to finance MTN's infrastructure project valued at \$250 million, in the same year two private equities invested \$43.2 million into Starcomms, and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) contributed \$100 million to a syndicated \$395 million loan to MTN (NCC 2005).

It was not just the financial muscle that mattered to the NCC. In addition, it hired very knowledgeable personnel to analyze the capabilities of the market participants in order to ensure that these participants were capable of providing telephone service. Again, this was remarkably different from the past when licenses were merely awarded to friends of high-ranking government personnel.

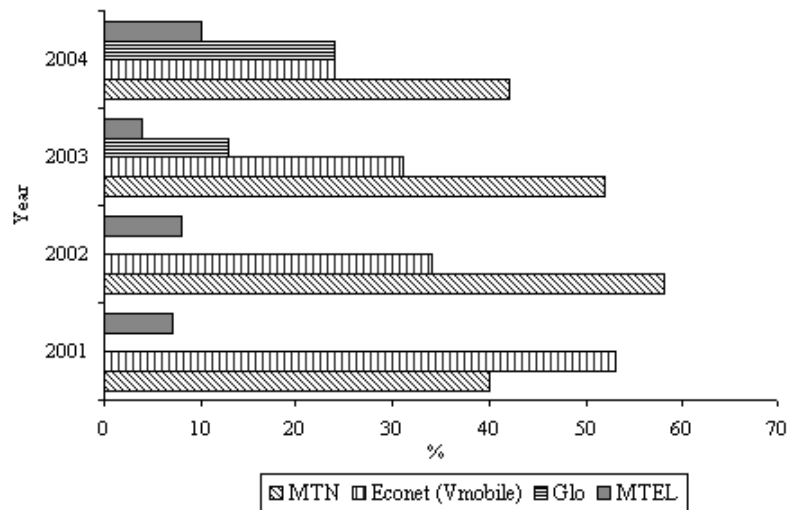
The NCC also provided a myriad of regulations to protect the consumer and assure continued consumer confidence in the industry. For instance, the NCC enforced its right to set interconnection rates in spite of legal challenges by major market participants. The courts ruled in favor of NCC. In another act, the NCC established a consumer parliament where consumers could confront providers on the quality of services. The establishment of the Consumer Parliament was fortuitous in September 2003. It followed a September 19, 2003 nationwide boycott of GSM services called by the National Association of Telecommunications Subscribers (NATCOMS) that was estimated to have cost the providers more than N1 billion in lost revenue. The NCC then established the parliament, bringing consumers face to face with providers. Since then, the parliament has been cited as helpful in creating consumer awareness and resolving several critical issues in the industry including network congestion and the migration to per second billing (NCC 2005).

### **Competition and aggressive marketing**

It was NCC that also produced the competition that has transformed the telephone industry in the country. However, the market behavior of the competing providers has gone a long way in contributing to the rapid growth in the industry and, thus, building up the needed critical mass. The competition has been fierce among the new entrants and most of the benefits of this competition have accrued to the consumers. Of course, the competitors have also been very profitable in the process. VMobile reportedly earned N22 billion<sup>3</sup> in six months in 2004 (Ojo 2005), and in 2005 MTN declared N119 billion gross earning for a six month period (Ajakaye 2005). It appears that only the erstwhile monopoly NITEL, which is still owned by the government, has failed to keep pace with the fierce competition. See Figure 5 for a breakdown of competing companies in the GSM telephone industry and their market share.

Service in the wireless telephone market has been based on prepaid SIM cards which are heavily discounted with the initial purchase under the marketing plan that is designed to make profits from re-sold call cards. This use of prepaid cards has been very successful as customers buy as much airtime as they are able to afford. Incoming calls are free.

**Figure 5: Market Shares of Major GSM Competitors**



Notably, the entrance of the second national operator (SNO), Globacom, increased market competition (NCC 2005; Ojo 2005). Globacom was very aggressive. It became the first to introduce per second billing in a market dominated by per minute billing methods. Much more dramatic was Globacom's Glo Mobile starter packs which went for N1 for basic prepaid in 2004. This was a major development as previous starter packs were sold at N20,000. This forced the competitors to discount their packs as the Glo Mobile service siphoned customers. Ultimately, the beneficiaries became the consumers who paid a little less for their calls, and the lower bills encouraged new consumer adopters to gain access to the market.

**Latent demand**

The demand for telephone access in Nigeria was at 10.12 million people in 1998 (Aragba-Akpore 1999; Onwumechili 2001). At that time, only 600,000 Nigerians had access, and service growth was slower than the population growth. Moreover, the growth in service demand was increasing rapidly and at a rate that many considered to be geometric. The 10.12 million figure was actually considered conservative because it only counted those who made the effort to put their names on a waiting list for service. This takes into consideration that some persons whose names are on the waiting list may well not have been able to afford the service at the time and have merely listed their names in order to reduce installation time when they become ready to afford the service. A much more realistic figure,

however, is the 15–20 million people identified by BMI-TechKnowledge (2001) as working class Nigerians who had the funds to afford telephone service during that period. However, even the BMI-TechKnowledge's figure may be conservative as the NCC has publicized the addressable market for telephone subscription as 25–30 million (NCC 2005).

In essence, the road to building a critical mass had been stunted prior to 2001 because of the scarcity of telephone service. It appears that a potential critical mass had existed and laid dormant because of the lack of telephone supply. An explosive growth in access became inevitable as telephone supply rose. Thus, critical mass had not been delayed by a lack of demand because there were millions of Nigerians who eagerly sought telephone service. Millions of those Nigerians were then able to quickly purchase the service when MTN, Econet (now VMobile), and later Glo Mobile began to offer GSM wireless telephone service after the award of licenses in 2001. It is, therefore, conceivable that the 10.12 million people on the waiting list in 1998 form a significant bulk of the 10 million people who now have access to telephone service in Nigeria.

### **Economic and commerce boost**

The relationship between the building of critical mass and the rise in economic and commerce activities is similar to the 'chicken and egg' question. While it is difficult to determine which one significantly led to the other, it is clear that they each have an effect on the other. The development of Nigeria's private sector has been very important to the building of critical mass, because the growth in the sector also meant the increase in the pool of individuals with the financial strength to gain and sustain telephone access. However, that access by the early adopters, among the private sector, also persuaded their business and social associates to gain access in order to maintain or sustain the viability of their relationship network.

It is important to note that the telephone industry has been credited as 'directly (employing) about 5,500 professionals and is responsible for another 450,000 jobs indirectly' (NCC 2005). These indirect jobs include roadside airtime resellers, handset distributors, third party site engineers and security personnel. These workers have in turn been able to earn the wages necessary to afford the purchase of telephone services and, thus, become adopters of the service.

**Informal economy**

Nigeria, like several other African countries, has a burgeoning informal economy. This economy is propped by the income made by Nigerians which goes unreported. There are various sources for this income including money obtained through tips, funds wired from relatives that are resident overseas and a wide range of other payments that are exclusive of the formally reported wages. The significant existence of this economy has made planning difficult as such planning often underestimates the elasticity of income that is available to Nigerians for expenditure.

More importantly, the existence of this economy provides the expendable income that is required for access to telephone service. The formal income provides the basis for the 15–20 million figures put forward by BMI-Knowledge as the maximum number of Nigerians able to purchase telephone service. The informal economy, however, is more likely to make those figures conservative.

The diversity in the formal incomes of current telephone subscribers explains the further effect of the informal economy. Those with access are as diverse as the wealthy, the roadside hawkers, students and micro-business owners. Ordinarily, the formal income that is reported by groups such as roadside hawkers and students will lead one to conclude an inability to sustain access to telephone service. However, these groups are all involved in the substantial practice of informal income earnings and, thus, their access can be confidently attributed to the impact of such income.

**What's next?**

Of course, having made the case for critical mass, the question is invariably, 'What's next?' The NCC's Ernest Ndukwe (2004) has forecast the connection of an additional 10 million people by the end of 2005, making a total 20 million people with access to telephones within a year. These 10 million additional people are residents of the urban centers and, as we know, the total of 20 million people is close to the saturation level for urban centers in Nigeria. There are 39 million people in the urban centers of which 23 million are estimated to be adults, 10 million of whom already have access. In essence, our discussion will have to focus on the possibilities of reaching saturation level in the urban centers. In addition, we will discuss the possibilities for substantive access in the rural areas.

**An urban saturation**

We have mentioned earlier that the adult population in the urban centers is an estimated 23 million Nigerians. If one assumes that 80 percent of this

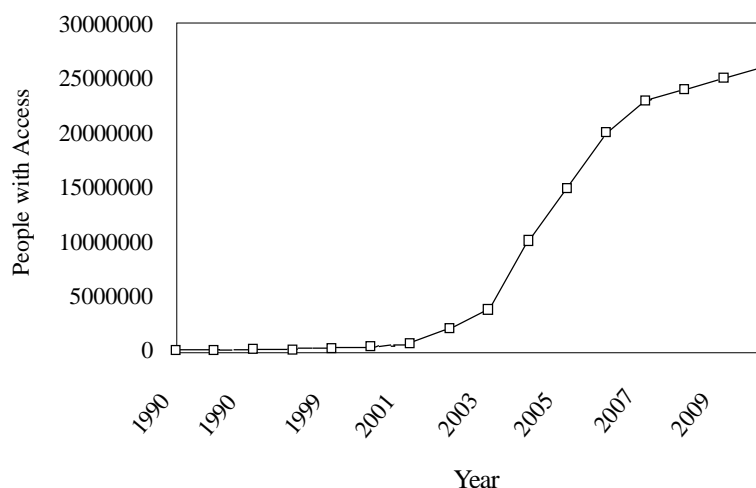
figure will eventually have direct access to the telephone, we are essentially stating that 18.4 million urban-resident Nigerians will have access. This figure is an approximation of the 20 million cited by NCC's Ndukwe. In any case, the 18.4 million represents the reasonable saturation level for telephone access in Nigerian urban centers. If we use this figure, then the potential number of subscribers yet to be reached is easily calculated with the simple formula:

$$\text{Saturation level} - N \text{ of existing subscribers} = \text{potential subscribers}$$

One would argue that the inflection point for growth is very close to the saturation level. We believe that the downward pressure on access costs is bound to continue for a while as the market itself is yet to stabilize and some of the main providers are new entrants to the market. These new providers will strive to establish a market foothold. Glo Mobile, for example, is relatively new and its market behavior, designed around lower pricing and innovation, has had a tremendous downward pressure on the market prices. Glo Mobile has dramatically cut access cost and introduced per second billing upon its entrance into the market. Glo Mobile is unlikely to revise this behavior until it secures market leadership to suit its position as a second national operator (SNO), which gives it more multi-service options than its main GSM competitors—MTN and VMobile. Furthermore, NITEL which offers an international gateway and GSM wireless service have been losing market share because of relative inactivity. This is likely to change as soon as NITEL is sold to aggressive investors. NITEL has been offered for sale for several years now and was briefly under a management company. Under an aggressive investor, NITEL is likely to dramatically change its market behavior and compete aggressively for customers. It is because of these variables that one foresees aggressive competition putting a further downward pressure on prices and, thus, fueling a continued and rapid growth in market access.

While the relationship between declining prices and potential customers will accelerate the growth in telephone access, such a growth may not reach the dizzying heights of 2001 to 2005 years. This is simply because of the fact that the number of potential subscribers is also declining. Thus, the growth will taper off gradually. However, the inflection point (i.e., the point at which the growth significantly levels off and then declines) is unlikely to be reached until close to the saturation point because of the continued significant demand for telephone access correlated with the downward pressure on prices. See Figure 6 for the predicted relationship between the inflection point and the saturation point.



**Figure 6:** Relationship between Inflection & Saturation Points

It is important to note that the saturation point that we have mentioned and that is shown in Figure 6 is not static. It is dynamic because it is affected by population growth as well as other relevant indices that may affect access to telephones such as the sudden jump in prices.

### Access in rural areas

Our discussion in this paper has focused almost exclusively on telephone service and access in the urban centers. As mentioned previously, that is a focus essentially on 39 of 130 million Nigerians. However, it also means that we have yet to discuss service and access to 91 million Nigerians who reside in the rural areas. The rationale has been that the providers have almost exclusively focused their services on the urban centers and, thus, an effective discussion of the building of critical mass had to focus squarely on service and access in the urban centers.

However, the goal of telephone service and access in Nigeria goes beyond the urban centers and, thus, the need for us to provide a brief discussion of service and access in the rural areas in this section of the paper.

Presently, there is minimal access in the rural areas. By this we do not mean that the wireless telephones do not operate in some of the rural areas. The telephones work in almost all areas in the country because the infrastructure is largely spread out. What we mean, therefore, is to ask who does and who does not have access? The answer is that while most

of the urban residents have access, it is exactly the opposite in the rural areas where very few people have access to telephones. There are numerous reasons for this, including the cost of service and providers' marketing focus, which we will discuss in the subsequent paragraphs.

Costs matter as we have noticed in our discussion of critical mass in the urban centers. In considering issues of heterogeneity and effort, building critical mass in the rural areas will be a much simpler matter because of some existing relationships between rural residents and urban residents. The key element will be cost. Rural residents have far less income than residents in the urban centers, which also means that access to disposable income is also relatively less for rural dwellers. Thus, it will require a much more inexpensive access to telephones to generate a rapid growth in telephone access in the rural areas. The NCC's Ernest Ndukwe (2004) has indicated a realization of this need to reduce costs by arguing that further reduction of duty rates, reduction of charges on satellite bandwidth and improvement in electricity supply are critical in expanding access. The early adopters or those likely to gain access early in the rural areas would be the rural elite (just as the case in the urban centers) such as the clergy, local government workers, micro-business owners, civil servants and other opinion leaders.

Another critical aspect in expanding access to the rural areas would be the providers' marketing focus. Presently, the major providers have all focused their attention on the lucrative urban centers. This will not change unless (1) the urban centers become saturated, or (2) significant incentives are provided for service to rural residents. It is already clear that the saturation level for urban centers is rapidly being approached. However, the government is yet to provide market incentives for service providers to market to the rural areas. Instead, the government has opted to develop half a million lines by early 2006 with a N28 billion loan from the Chinese government (NCC 2005). This project, however, may fail to be sustainable particularly if the government will be depended upon to maintain the lines. In the past, the government's culture of maintenance has been very poor. It seems that the NCC's alternative through the licensing of Broadband Technology Limited may have a longer-term viability. Broadband Technology Ltd. is expected to use VSAT technology to provide prepaid access to rural residents. If the service is offered at a low cost, the prepaid format will provide the revenue needed to sustain the network. Invariably, it is clear that the approach to rural access is unclear and at an infant stage. The growth of access in these areas will be much slower without more amenable access strategies.

## Conclusion

This paper has focused on providing an understanding of how critical mass was built for access to telephone service in Nigeria. It began by noting the very poor access rate to the service prior to 2001 in spite of the industry liberalization that was nearly a decade old at the time. The year 2001 marked a major transformation of the industry when a new regulatory administration provided the framework which rapidly built a critical mass of users by introducing an environment that led to access price reduction and intense competition, among other essential elements. The paper went on to analyze what lies ahead beyond the building of critical mass. The answers lie in the growth towards saturation of the urban market and the expansion of access to the rural areas. While the paper argues that saturation will be approached rapidly, it also points out that the lack of effective and coordinated rural access strategies could slow growth in the rural areas.

## Notes

1. NITEL was initially known by the name Post & Telegraphs (P & T) Company.
2. There are 39 million of 130 million estimated Nigerians residing in the urban centers. This is based on the estimation that 30 percent of Nigerians reside in the urban centers. Please consult statistics from *The World FactBook* (2005) and the *World Development Indicators* (2005). Note that these statistics also estimate that 58 percent of Nigerians are 15 years old or older.
3. The current exchange rate is \$1 = N140 as of 2005.

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## **African Media Coverage of NEPAD: Implications for Reporting Africa\***

Lilian Ndangam\*\*  
& Andrew Kanyegirire\*\*\*

### **Abstract**

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has emerged in recent years as an African-owned development framework for the African continent. Despite its emphasis on sustainable development, democratic governance, regional integration and strategies to implement these, a major challenge for NEPAD remains the continent-wide knowledge and understanding of its agenda and initiatives. This baseline study examines African news media coverage of NEPAD in order to assess the extent and nature of media engagement with NEPAD. Based on a content analysis of coverage in African newspapers and news providers available through the online news portal *Allafrica.com*, the study provides an overview of NEPAD coverage from January to July 2005 in a sample of African countries. Findings show that coverage of NEPAD is event based and elitist with little consistent critical analysis of processes that underpin the NEPAD framework. Analyses of this nature provide insights into how African media are reporting and engaging the public with regard to this continent-wide development initiative. The implications of these findings are discussed with reference to 'African journalism'.

**Key Terms:** NEPAD, Africa, news coverage, journalism, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

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- \* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2005 Highway Africa Conference held in Grahamstown, South Africa.
  - \* \* Lilian Ndangam is Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University. Her research interests include online news flow between African countries and African media reporting of Africa. She can be reached at email: L.Ndangam@ru.ac.za
  - \*\*\* Andrew Kanyegirire is a PhD student at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University. His work explores journalists' perceptions of their roles and identity constructions with regard to NEPAD. He can be reached at email: g00k1936@campus.ru.ac.za

## Résumé

Le Nouveau Partenariat pour le Développement de l'Afrique (NEPAD) est apparu ces dernières années comme un cadre de développement élaboré par l'Afrique pour le continent africain. Malgré son insistance sur le développement durable, la gouvernance démocratique, l'intégration régionale et les stratégies de mise en œuvre de ces projets, le défi majeur du NEPAD demeure toutefois la connaissance large des réalités du continent ainsi que la compréhension de son agenda et de ses initiatives. Cette étude préliminaire étudie la couverture du projet du NEPAD par la presse africaine, dans le but d'évaluer l'étendue et la nature de l'engagement des médias envers le Nepad. Sur la base de l'analyse du contenu de la couverture médiatique faite par les journaux africains et les sources d'informations, disponibles sur le portail d'informations en ligne *Allafrica.com*, cette étude fournit un aperçu de la couverture médiatique du NEPAD, de janvier à juillet 2005, dans un échantillon de pays africains choisis. Les résultats montrent que la couverture du NEPAD faite par les médias est établie sur une base événementielle et élitiste, avec une très faible analyse critique des processus sous-tendant le cadre du NEPAD. De telles analyses montrent comment les médias africains informent et sollicitent l'implication du public vis-à-vis de cette initiative de développement établie à l'échelle du continent. Les implications de ces résultats sont commentées à travers des références au « journalisme africain ».

**Mots clés:** NEPAD, Afrique, la presse, les medias et actualité, Mécanisme Africain d'Evaluation des Pairs (MAEP)

## Mass media and the African story

For the past several decades, Western news media reporting of Africa has come under scrutiny from international media scholarship, journalists and politicians. International communication research has pointed to little coverage of African countries in the West and a dominant focus on coups, wars, corruption and disease (Palmer 1987; Schraeder and Endless 1998). Content analyses of international news identify conflicts and crises as dominant topics in reports of less developed countries in the media of Western countries. The reportage also tends to frame corruption, violence and disorder as systemic problems evolving from the natural character of these countries, whereas similar problems in the West are framed as mere deviances or temporary imperfections (see Dahlgren and Chakrapani 1982; Kariithi 2000).

During the 2003 Media in Africa conference at Stellenbosch University, Philip Molefe, head of the South African based satellite channel *SABC Africa*, argued that 'the major challenge facing the media in Africa is the ownership of the African story. It is a known fact that the story of Africa continues to be packaged and edited in London, Paris and Atlanta' (Molefe 2003:1). Molefe was echoing a theme previously highlighted by South

Africa's President Thabo Mbeki during the 2003 South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) conference, where Mbeki underscored the need for African media—in the context of the African Union (AU)—to facilitate knowledge and understanding of the continent by reporting 'Africa to Africans' and reporting 'Africa as Africans' (Mbeki 2003). The Presidential Roundtables hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in April 2005 again highlighted the underreporting of African countries in the media of Western countries. A ten year content analysis commissioned by Boston University's African Presidential Archives Commission observed an overwhelmingly negative coverage of Africa in American media (APARC 2005).

The quantitative and qualitative imbalance in news flow between Africa and the West remains an issue of concern to scholars, journalism professionals and politicians alike. While Western media coverage continues to be the focus of professional and political discourse, inadequate attention has been paid to African news reporting of Africa. Inherent in the critique of Western media coverage is the uncritical assumption that African media reportage on Africa by Africans would be different from the Western media reportage that has been criticized in the literature. Yet notions of 'telling the African story' and 'reporting Africa as Africans' that are central to these debates have not been sufficiently analysed. Problematising these notions prompts us to ask questions such as: What is the African story? What does it mean to report Africa as Africans? In whose interest is it to report Africa as Africans?

In attempting to unpack the aforementioned debates, we can note that there is an implicit assumption that since journalists in Africa are imbued with some self-sense of being 'African', they will therefore report on Africa in a positive light in contrast to the broader 'negative' coverage on Africa by 'Western' and other media. There are two potential facets to this seemingly plausible argument. On the one hand, journalists in Africa by virtue of their perceptions and specific context can report the continent differently from Western journalists. On the other hand, reporting differently does not necessarily equate to portraying Africa positively. In addition, the tendency to foreground reportage on the basis of some essential purity of being could lead to reportage that reinforces the self-serving interests of governments and business—at the cost of the interests and rights of the wider African publics—all in the name of positive reportage.

There are many stories within Africa. Apart from well-documented stories of HIV/AIDS and bad governance, there are stories of regional cooperation, such as Somalia's government currently based in Kenya, AU

peace-keeping in the Darfur region of Sudan and the Cameroon-Chad pipeline. There are stories of lesser-known issues such as the recent struggle over gorillas between Cameroon and South Africa, and there are also stories of successes such as *Nollywood* and South African soap operas.

The emergence of pan-African initiatives, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) within the reconstituted AU and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), are some of the significant developments and potentially pertinent stories on the continent in recent years (Kotze and Steyn 2003). To elaborate, in transforming the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) into the AU, one of the aims was to reposition the continent 'in such a way that interaction among its nation states and with the rest of the world is improved and geared towards sustainable development' (Mogekwu 2004:238). NEPAD, which, in its terms, is aimed at poverty eradication and the acceleration of Africa's integration into the global economy, is the 'African-owned' and 'African-led' development vision of the AU (NEPAD 2001:13). Specific goals are to achieve economic growth of 7 percent per year and to meet the international development targets agreed upon by the United Nations in 2001 through investment in certain priority sectors such as ICTs (NEPAD 2001:1, 24–25). Collectively, these initiatives articulate a strengthening of continental cooperation, emphasising a pan-Africanist fortification of democracy, sustainable development, economic growth and good governance. For instance, NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) enables member states to police each other on issues of human rights and democratic governance (NEPAD 2001).

Despite its visionary premise and promise of transforming African development and governance, NEPAD has been criticised for the neo-liberal ideology that underpins its development, evolution and mode of deployment (Adesina 2004; Bond 2002). In addition, having excluded the unions, civil society and religious groups in drawing up its framework, the initiative has been criticised for being elitist and exclusionary, all of which is in opposition to its 'African-owned' credentials (Anyang' Nyong'o et al. 2002). Hence, Adesina (2002), Bond (2002) and Taylor and Nel (2002) question NEPAD and its precursor the African Renaissance on the grounds that they are an extension of neo-liberalism and the failed macro-economic policies of the 'Washington Consensus'—structural adjustment and tied aid.

Regardless of these criticisms, the proponents of the emerging political and economic initiatives collectively seek to enhance regional integration and strengthen unity among African countries (Kotze and Steyn 2003; Mbeki 2003; NEPAD 2004, 2005). As a regional development initiative,



NEPAD can be seen as a pertinent African story—one among many stories of Africa—that is worthy of attention by Africa’s media. Few, if any, studies have explored media reportage of regional initiatives and transnational events in Africa. This paper is a baseline study exploring the coverage of NEPAD by African media. Such an analysis presents an opportunity to establish the visibility of the initiative in the continent’s media. This is particularly relevant when discussing issues in reporting Africa.

### **An exploration of the mass media – NEPAD nexus**

A recent study on elite African perceptions of the AU and NEPAD by Kotze and Steyn (2003) found that the majority of elites in South Africa, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria and Zimbabwe ranked daily newspapers as their primary source of information about these institutions. Evidently, journalists and the mass media potentially play a significant role in increasing knowledge and understanding of initiatives such as NEPAD and, by implication, fostering integration, reinforcing co-operation and strengthening unity across Africa. Journalists are viewed as disseminators of information to the public and by implication stakeholders in the NEPAD process. The latter position is most evident in the APRM’s inclusion of journalists as some of the stakeholders to be consulted during the peer review process (Herbert 2003). Having said that, NEPAD and the peer review framework are for the most part silent on freedom of expression and media freedoms as key criteria for good governance (Berger 2002; IFEX 2005).

Kouakou highlights the promotional and indispensable role that can be played by the mass media in branding NEPAD (2003:44). For him, the media are part of the information conduits by which Africans can come to understand and participate in NEPAD and the AU. Moge kwu (2004) also suggests that the mass media ‘should’ promote the ideals of NEPAD by addressing the challenge of xenophobia, which is evidently in opposition to the pan-African elements of NEPAD. Mbeki, a leading proponent of NEPAD, has raised related views for instance during the 2003 SANEF meet where he argued:

Central to the conceptualisation of the African Union and its development programme, NEPAD, is the collective determination to promote African unity and the political and socio-economic integration of our continent. This is informed by the conviction that the peoples of Africa are interdependent and share a common destiny. It makes no sense that they should be separated from one another by ignorance of one another. Indeed that dangerous state of unknowing, which leads to prejudice and

superstition against and about one another, would make it impossible for us to achieve the goal of African unity (Mbeki 2003:1–3).

For Mbeki, continental unity cannot be achieved when Africans are ignorant about one another. It is therefore important for the mass media in Africa to facilitate knowledge and understanding of the continent by reporting 'Africa to Africans' and by reporting 'Africa as Africans' (Mbeki 2003). The idea here, also argued by Kouakou (2003:44–45), is that journalists and mass media in Africa can encourage dialogue among Africans and can create a shared sense of vision and *ubuntu*—the discourse of which can be used to tackle social problems such as xenophobia. In doing so, the assertion is that the media will also be creating a public forum for discussions on NEPAD all of which could expand the African-ownership of NEPAD (Kouakou 2003; Mogeckwu 2004). This position highlights the important informational and supportive roles that the African media can play in bringing NEPAD to the public's attention whilst also creating a forum for stakeholder involvement in the initiative.

Overall, proponents of NEPAD and the AU are relying on the frameworks of these initiatives to enhance regional integration and cooperation and to strengthen unity among African countries (Kotze and Steyn 2003; Mbeki 2003; NEPAD 2001, 2004, 2005). As Mogeckwu (2004) rightly asserts, a meaningful interaction with the world through these pan-African schemes depends on a successful integration of people within the African continent so that they can deal with the rest of world as a collective. In this regard, one could argue that as a pan-African initiative NEPAD is one of many important stories to emerge from Africa over the last few years. Its focus and implementation are arguably key topics on the African political, economic and development agenda. The implicit and explicit location of the mass media within the NEPAD discourse speaks to the significant role of the media in the integration of the continent and necessitates a consideration of how the media within Africa are reporting this initiative. This is not to say that the media alone are the key players here. In fact, various stakeholders in society including the media will have to contribute to NEPAD in their own separate ways given that the success or failure of NEPAD has real implications for them all. So how is African media engaging with this initiative?

Based on a content analysis of coverage in African newspapers and news providers available through the online news portal *Allafrica.com*, this study provides an overview of continent-wide visibility of NEPAD in the African media. The analysis is guided by the following questions: 1) What are the dominant themes of coverage? 2) Who gets to speak in the

news on NEPAD? What types of sources are cited by the newspapers? and 3) Which countries are visible in news about NEPAD?

### Research method

To establish the visibility of NEPAD in the African media, a sample of NEPAD related stories on *Allafrica.com*'s English language website were coded, covering the period from January to July 2005. *Allafrica.com* is an online news portal which gathers news from more than 120 websites of media organisations around Africa. The site aggregates and distributes news from a variety of English and French language newspapers, news agencies and organisations mainly drawn from the continent. It operates two websites that respectively cater to English-speaking and French-speaking audiences interested in news about Africa from Africa. Owing to the language capability of the researchers, only coverage on *Allafrica.com*'s English language site was examined.

Mainstream media such as newspapers, television and radio in Africa have increasingly adopted the new media technologies and computer mediated communication avenues as tools for producing and disseminating content across time, space and distance. As a medium that is helping shape global communication in the twenty-first century, the internet offers an additional dimension to news dissemination and international communication (Volkmer 2001). To this end, news websites build international connections and simultaneously represent global communities (Moore 2002). News audiences with access to the internet increasingly turn to the medium as a source of news while many daily newspapers tend to present breaking news on their websites instead of waiting until the next day's print publication (Paterson and Sreberny 2003; Pavlik 2000).

Based on online publishing models identified by He and Zhu (2002), including broucherware/shovel ware, quasi-interactive and virtual community, it can be reasonably argued that many African newspapers are still in the shovel ware model of online publishing. This model entails print versions of newspapers simply being transplanted online with no room for feedback, interactivity or additional information (He and Zhu 2002) and not specifically edited for online audiences (Jensen 2001; Olukemi 2004). In addition, many African media's desire to adopt the new media technologies remains compounded by low-levels of technological investment and ICT skills. Consequently, while we are not able to gain insights with regard to the pagination, illustration and layout of the news content on NEPAD in the actual newspapers, the news texts available online were almost always a replica of the content in the hard copy of newspapers.

The search was limited to stories ‘about’ NEPAD during the sample period. ‘About’ was defined as mentioning NEPAD in two separate paragraphs and/or references to NEPAD-related topics and policies in two separate sentences in a news article. The categories of coded topics were modified from the priority themes and concerns in the 2001 NEPAD document and combined with other mainstream topic categories identified from prior engagement with the data. The following themes were identified for coding: regional cooperation, economic performance, peer review, corruption, trade/aid, investment, ICTs, agriculture, poverty, health, gender issues, civil war /conflict, human rights and others. Articles were also coded for the country of focus, type of sources cited and gender of news sources.

### **Results and discussion**

During the seven month time period, the search came up with 101 stories from 27 newspapers and news agencies (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** List of newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
This Day	20	19.8
Business Day	12	11.9
The New Times	8	7.9
The East African Standard	6	5.9
The Nation	6	5.9
Accra Mail	5	5.0
BuaNews	4	4.0
Daily Champion	4	4.0
New Vision	4	4.0
AIM-Maputo	3	3.0
Angola Press Agency	3	3.0
IT Web	3	3.0
The Monitor	3	3.0
New Era	3	3.0
Vanguard	3	3.0
Daily Trust	2	2.0
The Post-Lusaka	2	2.0
allafrica.com	1	1.0
Ghanaian Chronicle	1	1.0
The Herald	1	1.0
Mail & Guardian	1	1.0
Mmegi/The Reporter	1	1.0
Nigeria First	1	1.0
The Post (Buea)	1	1.0
The Standard Times	1	1.0
UN News Service	1	1.0
Zimbabwe Standard	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Nigerian newspapers reported most frequently on NEPAD with thirty-one stories thereby accounting for close to 30 percent of the stories in the sample (see Table 2). South African newspapers accounted for nineteen stories while Kenyan newspapers featured eleven stories on NEPAD during the period of analysis. NEPAD was less visible in countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone whose story count fluctuated between one and five stories (1–3 percent of stories).

**Table 2:** Location of newspaper

Location of Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
Nigeria	31	30.7
South Africa	19	18.8
Kenya	11	10.9
Rwanda	9	8.9
Uganda	7	6.9
Ghana	6	5.9
Angola	3	3.0
Mozambique	3	3.0
Namibia	2	2.0
Zambia	2	2.0
Zimbabwe	2	2.0
Botswana	1	1.0
Cameroon	1	1.0
Ethiopia	1	1.0
Sierra Leone	1	1.0
Outside Africa*	2	2.0
Total	101	100.0

\* One story had a UN dateline, and the other came from *allafrica.com* whose head office is based in Washington DC.

That the coverage of NEPAD is significantly higher in Nigeria and South Africa is not surprising given that both countries are leading champions of NEPAD as well as leading political and economic powers on the continent (see ‘NEPAD, Nigeria continues to play prominent role’, *Nigeria First*, April 20, 2005). Some countries with a low frequency of NEPAD coverage such as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia have yet to voluntarily sign up to the APRM. In fact, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe have tended to express less enthusiasm for NEPAD than others with Namibia in particular arguing that it already has in place structures that are in line with the APRM (see ‘Namibia cautious over peer review’, *New Era*, April 14, 2005; ‘Guebuza hails NEPAD but Mugabe “looks East”’, *Zimbabwe Standard*, May 2, 2005).

### Main country of focus

Media coverage of NEPAD predominantly took on an African angle, that is to say, the effects, implications and impacts of NEPAD were projected onto the continent. A third of the stories focused mainly on Africa as a whole and less on a particular country and/or sub-region (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Main country of focus

Country	Frequency	Percent
Africa- General	30	29.7
Nigeria	17	16.8
Kenya	9	8.9
South Africa	9	8.9
Uganda	8	7.9
Rwanda	7	6.9
Ghana	4	4.0
Angola	3	3.0
Mozambique	3	3.0
Zimbabwe	3	3.0
Namibia	2	2.0
Cameroon	1	1.0
Ivory Coast	1	1.0
Sierra Leone	1	1.0
Zambia	1	1.0
More than one country	2	2.0
Total	101	100.0

### Event-based coverage

Coverage of NEPAD was most intense during those periods when there was an event such as a regional summit, national peer review session, project launch or visit between African leaders. For instance, the most frequent reportage occurred during late March, April and June, months characterised by the peer review forums among other major events related to NEPAD. The presence of NEPAD was relatively limited during those periods that were not characterised by a given event (see listing of events below). While events remain important, processes drive development and democratic initiatives. Events are only the subtotal of processes. NEPAD therefore remained almost invisible during the routine news week.

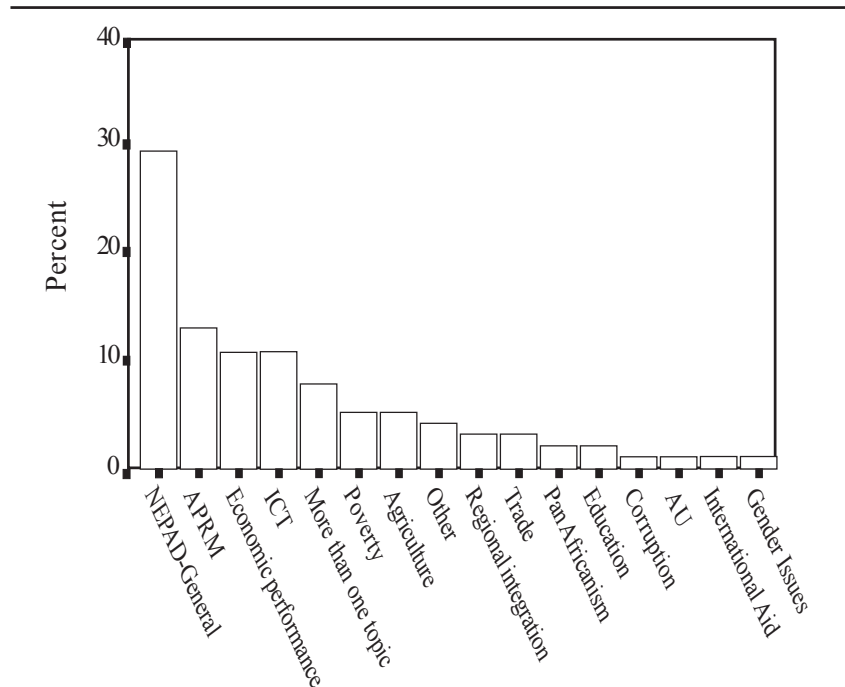
### Topics: African Peer Review Mechanism

The topics that appeared most often in news stories included the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), followed by NEPAD in general, economic development/performance, ICTs (e-schools, ICT firms to invest, the EaSSy project) and finally stories that reported on more than one main

topic in their coverage of NEPAD (see Figure 1). Topics such as poverty (the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs]), agriculture (the CAADP programme) and regional integration (Regional Economic Communities [REC] such as Southern African Development Community [SADC] and East African Community [EAC]) accounted for 2 to 5 percent of all stories. Themes that made a cameo appearance and yet are crucial to the success of NEPAD, include health (HIV/AIDS), gender issues (women account for the bulk of productive work in Africa) and corruption.

Despite the presence of an African angle in the reportage, national interests also shape the reporting of a continent-wide framework such as NEPAD. This could explain the high visibility of NEPAD’s peer review in countries that are signatories to the initiative. It also demonstrates the complications of covering a continent-wide initiative that lacks continent-wide appreciation. The flagship APRM programme remains crucial to establishing member states’ commitment to good governance as an increasingly viable means of acquiring aid and foreign assistance. In return for upholding practices such as the peer review, the donor community in the West is expected to provide increased foreign direct investments (FDI),

**Figure 1: Main topic of story**



aid, debt relief and fairer trade access to enable Africa to meet the MDGs (Kotze and Steyn 2003:109; see also Herbert 2002). Yet whilst the peer review is open to all member states of the AU, signing up to it remains voluntary. By the time of the most recent AU summit in Sirte, Libya in July 2005, twenty-three out of the fifty-three member states had agreed to be assessed (see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Countries that have acceded to the APRM

Algeria	Cameroon	Rwanda	Angola
Burkina Faso	Gabon	Senegal	Lesotho
Kenya	Nigeria	Benin	Sierra Leone
Ghana	Uganda	South Africa	Egypt
Mali	Ethiopia	Mozambique	Congo
Mauritius	Tanzania	Malawi	

Source: Adapted from NEPAD website accessed July 16, 2005.

### **Elites as Sources**

The most frequent sources relied on by reporters in the coverage on NEPAD were officials attached to NEPAD. This includes officials from the regional NEPAD secretariat, the national units/chapters of NEPAD, the regional APRM secretariat, national APRM steering committees and the official spokespersons of these bodies all of whom accounted for 19 percent of sources. Fifteen percent of sources for news coverage of NEPAD topics were ministers. Heads of state, businesspersons (CEOs, private sector organisations, NEPAD business organs) and press releases each accounted for 12 percent of sources. Altogether, press releases, businesspersons and heads of state were more likely to appear as sources than any others (see Table 5).

The analysis of the study results showed civil society organisations and representatives, such as unions, advocacy and grassroots, accounting for 5.9 percent of news sources. The limited sources provide less opportunity for coherent oppositional perspectives in the coverage. Similarly, the use of academic and expert sources, also accounting for 5.9 percent of sources, was infrequent, thereby providing less opportunity for informed, analytical perspectives.



**Table 5:** Main source for story

Source	Frequency	Percent
NEPAD official	19	18.8
Minister	15	14.9
Head of State	12	11.9
Press release	12	11.9
Businessperson	12	11.9
Other	8	7.9
Document/report	6	5.9
Academic/expert	6	5.9
Civil society	6	5.9
None	5	5.0
Total	101	100.0

Among the most frequently referenced sources, heads of state, ministers and NEPAD officials are represented as active parties in news coverage of NEPAD. They do the work of NEPAD, advocating and speaking on behalf of and for NEPAD. As represented in the following headlines, these public figures are actively ‘appealing’ for funds or ‘blasting’ those standing in the way of Africa’s interests:

‘Obasanjo appeals for moderate oil price’ (*This Day* March 8, 2005)

‘Obasanjo blasts foreign nations over looted funds’ (*Daily Champion* June 21, 2005)

‘Museveni to launch first e-school’ (*New Vision* July 15, 2005)

‘Mubarak invites Kagame’ (*The New Times* April 15, 2005)

‘Zuma, Mbeki on official trips’ (*BuaNews* April 18, 2005)

‘Tukur advocates rail link across Africa’ (*This Day* March 30, 2005)

‘MPs analyse NEPAD’s mechanism’ (*Angola Press Agency* January 26, 2005)

In contrast, business sources, including NEPAD business forums in Nigeria and South Africa, potential investors and CEO’s of ICT and banking firms, were for the most part represented as voices of and for prudence, investment and trade in Africa. The following headlines show this pattern:

‘NEPAD’s Business Chief lashes out AU over Zimbabwe’ (*Business Day* April 29, 2005)

‘Business ethics in Africa on the table’ (*Business Day* March 7, 2005)

‘NAICOM banks on NEPAD for improved penetration’ (*Daily Champion* May 10, 2005)

‘Kenya primed to be a digital hub’ (*The East African Standard* March 20, 2005)

‘Kaduna trade fair: NEPAD urged to participate’ (*Vanguard* January 13, 2005)

‘NEPAD: 127 billion pensions available in 14 countries’ (*The New Times* April 29, 2005)

‘Funding NEPAD’ (*Business Day* June 28, 2005)

‘NEPAD to finance projects of Angola’s Peasant’s Union’ (*Angola Press Agency* February 21, 2005)

Further, both civil society and academic sources were cited more frequently in a responding rather than defining role. These sources were used to react to issues and perspectives established by others. They were most likely to be represented as deliberating on NEPAD and on the actions of the decision-makers rather than taking action. For example:

‘Africa’s development plan: An analysis’ (*Vanguard* January 3, 2005)

‘Civil society deliberates on AU + NEPAD’ (*The Standard*, Sierra Leone, May 21, 2005)

‘Civil society forum holds on APRM tomorrow’ (*This Day* February 8, 2005)

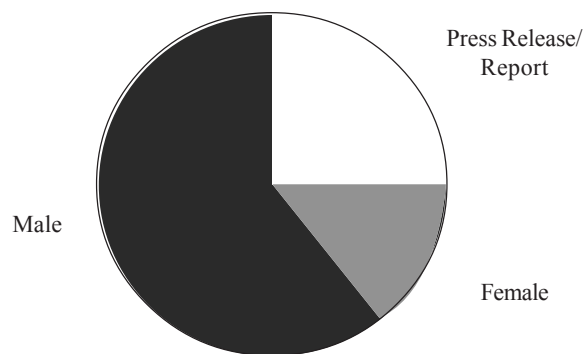
‘Don’t trade NEPAD away’ (*This Day* January 27, 2005)

Arguably, these varied emphases in news sources have to do with news gathering and production routines within journalistic practice which privilege authoritative sources as active sources. However, the implication of this skew in news sources and social actors is for NEPAD to remain perceived and represented as government-driven with little ownership from other stakeholders.

The face of NEPAD is dominantly male (see Figure 2). Men are most visible as news actors and sources in the reporting on NEPAD and represented 61 percent of primary sources in all news stories. Women accounted for 14 percent of main sources cited in NEPAD news stories. This is the result of a set of factors involving how the political and social system is structured in African society, socialization (the way politics continues to be conceived of and conducted as a dominantly masculine

profession) and the professional and internal newsroom dynamics of the media where women remain generally invisible. The absence of women as news actors in the reporting of NEPAD also reflects the invisibility of gender issues within NEPAD's initiatives. In the entire sample only one story specifically focused on gender: 'NEPAD to launch gender task force' (*BuaNews* July 10, 2005).

**Figure 2:** Gender of news sources



### **Conclusions: Some reflections on reporting NEPAD**

From our analysis, the four leading trends in the coverage on NEPAD are event-based coverage, a dominance of elite male news sources, a predominant focus on the peer review, and the recurrence of a regional African angle in the media reportage of NEPAD issues. Event-based coverage leaves little room for critical analyses, features and commentary on processes. Yet democracy and development are about processes of representation and participation. Nevertheless, events are part of NEPAD's mode of deployment, such as launching e-schools, the schools feed programme, seminars and training workshops. But events are only actions within stages of a broader process. Coverage needs to take into account the processes underpinning the events.

Important though the APRM is to the NEPAD project, the focus on the peer review in the reportage is potentially at the expense of other initiatives. In fact, even within the focus on the peer review, news reporting is limited to issues of political governance with little or no reporting on corporate and economic governance which are equally important aspects of the peer review process. This selective coverage reinforces the view

of the APRM as a beauty contest whereby the better-looking contestant is rewarded with more aid, so that by simply signing up and submitting to the review a participating country is more acceptable in the eyes of Western donors. Similarly, the dominant focus on specific personalities and countries as the face of NEPAD, such as Nigeria's President Obasanjo and South Africa's President Mbeki, potentially creates perceptions of the initiative as personality driven and non-inclusive. This perception could potentially damage the long-term visibility of the initiative, because when those personalities are no longer in the public limelight, by implication NEPAD might become less visible. Overall, NEPAD in the news comes across as a plan of, for and by the elite, as an initiative that looks to specialists, the private sector and regional leaders, and thereby limits the opportunity for broader engagement with NEPAD at grass roots levels.

Explanations for the kind of coverage observed can perhaps be found in the understanding of the NEPAD framework and its mode of deployment and not just the individual journalists, newspapers and competing national interests. Part of the difficulty in bringing NEPAD to media attention is a result of the complexity of the initiative. By journalistic standards, NEPAD is a multifaceted story to cover. Its broad framework, aims, goals and institutional/organisational structure cut across already existing RECs and make it a big and at times complex story that challenges journalists. To illustrate, some NEPAD events and meetings organised during the period of analysis include:

- APRM Country Support Mission to Nigeria, 21–24 March,
- APRM meeting of Panel of Eminent Persons, Johannesburg, South Africa; and, NEPAD Steering Committee meeting, Sandton, South Africa, 30–31 March,
- APRM Country Review visit to Ghana, 4–8 April,
- African Partnership Forum, Abuja, Nigeria, 9–10 April,
- NEPAD Science and Technology Diary, Dakar, Senegal, 11–14 April,
- NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee Summit and the 3rd African Peer Review Forum, Sharm El Shaik, Egypt, 18–19 April,
- APRM Country Support Mission to Rwanda, 14–25 April.

Taking into account the diversity, frequency and location of these NEPAD-related events combined with the reality of journalistic practice—deadlines,

pressures from business, national interests and internal and external pressures—makes it harder for the media to unpack the NEPAD story.

Another aspect of the complexity of NEPAD reflects both the perceived and noted internal discrepancy in the NEPAD framework. While NEPAD may be ‘African-owned’, the consensus on its viability remains in doubt particularly given its ‘curious dilemma of being hailed as a visionary document by the West’ while being severely criticised by African civil society and academics for its neo-liberal policy orientation (Adesina 2004: 125). It certainly does not help that the name of the initiative is itself the butt of many jokes (*kneepad*). As De Waal asks ‘What’s new about NEPAD?’ (2002:465). Many journalists around the continent probably pose this question. Africa’s economic history is littered with plans that promised and failed to deliver. From the Lagos Plan of Action to the Bretton Woods imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS), the continent has seen its fair share of experimental and failed plans of development. These plans often exist alongside competing initiatives developed by regional organisations such as SADC and ECOWAS. More recently, with the launching of Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa, it is possible that many in Africa are left questioning the duplication of initiatives and where NEPAD fits within another grand plan to spur development on the continent. Where does NEPAD end and where does the Commission for Africa begin?

The prioritisation of positive coverage of NEPAD, implied by proponents of NEPAD and NEPAD’s communication strategies (see NEPAD 2004), is in itself problematic for the media. Following the recent presentation of the review reports for Ghana and Rwanda at the third summit of the peer review forum in Abuja, Nigeria in June 2005, the APRM secretariat expressed its disappointment at the mostly negative coverage of the event by the press (NEPAD 2005). The APRM secretariat felt that the press had only focused on the ‘shortcomings identified in the review reports’, whilst ignoring the positives and that maybe the press also lacked a proper understanding of the review process (NEPAD 2005:3). For the APRM secretariat:

[T]he press has a critical role in supporting the APR process and disseminating accurate information to the public. The press can and should educate the masses on the positive aspects of the process and highlight the very good and positive developments happening in the African continent (NEPAD 2005:3).

As argued earlier, the danger inherent in such an expectation is that African media portage on NEPAD could easily be reduced to reinforcing the

self-serving interests of business leaders, governments and elites at the cost of the interests and rights of wider African publics, groups and communities whilst also stifling criticism of the initiative.

The challenge is to tell the NEPAD story without simply becoming guard dogs and lapdogs for the interests of the African elite; that is, to avoid self-congratulatory messages about NEPAD, excessive Afro-optimism and/or positive stories purely reported for the purposes of securing the interests of the powerful under the guise of genuine public communication. It is pertinent to note here that being analytical and critical in the reportage on NEPAD does not necessarily detract from appealing emotionally to people as 'Africans' or documenting important NEPAD successes. The challenge is to tell the NEPAD story in such a way that is interesting, appealing and rectifies the distorted image of Africa in the news, whilst also pointing out its shortfalls and successes and their implications for the daily lived experiences of Africans.

To an extent, making sense of NEPAD across local, national and regional interests will rely on well-mapped communication strategies that link continental-level NEPAD issues with national and local interests. Here we are not simply referring to communication campaigns about the positives of NEPAD or regional training workshops on how to cover NEPAD (important as all these are), but rather to start thinking of how we can get the majority of people to understand NEPAD better through languages and journalism formats that can easily be accessed by all.

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