**TOWARDS AN ACTION PROGRAMME FOR DEMOCRACY**

**AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE**

**AUGUST 5-6, 2014**

**MEDIA WORKING GROUP**

The media had 16 participants coming from all the five sub-regions of the continent. The discussions were facilitated by Mark Nelson of CIMA, NED. The group rapporteur was Martha Haile.

The role of both traditional media and new media is to educate, inform and entertain. However, the media also has a key role in holding to account all in public office and bodies. Also, the media has a critical role in cultural socialization. Further, the media has a clear role in validating positive and inclusive development processes and outcomes.

A lot has changed in the recent past with regard to the media across most African countries. All states, except Eritrea, have in some way liberalized the media sector. However, challenges still exist. Recent media freedom indices indicate that only four African states are free, 25 are partly free and 23 are not free. Media also continues to be highly sensational and partisan in their reportage. While 13 countries on the continent have access to information laws, some of the laws are inconsistent with access to information, and there is a trend of poor implementation of transparency and accessibility regime. Most of the state bureaucracy continues to permit official secrecy.

There has also increased access to internet and mobile telephony. However, so far only 7 per cent of the global internet users are in Africa. It is estimated that 16 per cent (167,335,676) of the African population has access to internet. It is estimated that there are 51,612,460 facebook subscribers and ……….mobile telephone users in Africa. This has unleashed new avenues for civic engagement and citizen journalism. However, mobile telephony and internet are not yet ubiquitous.

Seven broad problems and challenges facing Media Sector in Africa were identified:

1. Media has not been seen as a critical sector to the emerging democratic and developmental state in Africa;
2. Africa is replete of cases of open violence, torture and intimidation of journalists and media workers. However, attempts to investigate them and bring to justice those deemed culpable for violations have been lackluster at best;
3. Most states keep laws and regulatory practices that unduly limit freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information;
4. Poor working conditions of journalists and media workers in most of the countries particularly women;
5. Most countries, except Eritrea, have a form of liberalized media but a veneer of private media is not a guarantee of independence, pluralism and diversity; state broadcasters continue to serve the interest of those in political power and not national public interests; and media regulatory organisations are not independent and lack requisite skills and capacity to be objective regulators;
6. Low capacity within most media across the continent to report effectively on developmental issues;
7. There is under representation of women as managers, workers, sources of information in most traditional media (print and electronic media);
8. The penetration of accessible and affordable internet and mobile telephony continues to be hampered because most states have left it into the hands of private actors and not developed as a public good.

**Recommendations**

As a group we recommend that:

The media must be central to all discussions on Post 2015 Sustainable development goals and the ongoing USA-Africa trade partnerships.

**USA Government**

* There is need for the USA government to deal with the incoherence that often times is witnessed between the rhetoric in Washington and the practice of respective USA missions in different countries;
* The government must seek to develop clear media support programme within its USAID programme portfolios;
* The must seek to balance its support of counter-terrorism processes and laws with clear protection of freedom of expression and media; and access to information.

**Media Agencies**

* International media networks must endeavor to cover Africa different holistically as opposed to the continued narrative of Africa being the hopeless continent of disease, death and desperation

**Government**

* All governments must review and repeal all repressive laws that unduly restrict freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. Some of such laws include but are not limited to criminal defamation, insult, sedition, publication of false news;
* Using the ACHPR Model Law on Access to Information as a minimum benchmark, all governments must pass, review and implement comprehensive access to information laws;
* All governments where there are pending cases of violations of media freedom cases must institute credible and independent investigation processes and bring to justice all those deemed to be culpable in those violations;
* Establish independent media regulatory mechanisms with a view to ensure media pluralism, diversity and transparency in broadcasting and telecommunications frequency spectrum allocation and management;
* Utilise the African Peer Review Mechanism, UN Universal Periodic Review processes and recommendations to improve on the situation and role of media in development;
* Establish clear and transparent policies on proportionate state advertising that promotes independent media and is not used to stifle critical media organisations.

**Inter-Governmental Organisations**

* All inter-governmental organisations must develop clear media support programmes and where possible designate specified quotas of their resources to media development work;
* That the World Bank, African Development Bank and UN agencies should offer leadership by promulgating access to information policies that enable African citizens to know their dealing with their respective governments but also develop clear programme support to the media;
* The UN treaty bodies and special mandate holders must underscore the centrality of freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information as fundamental rights but also instrumental rights in protection of economic and social rights;
* The African Union Commission must show leadership in assisting states to ratify and meet their obligations under the international and regional human rights treaties and support positive comparative learning across the continent;
* The African Commission on Human and Peoples Right must be supported to undertake both monitoring and promotional work;
* The African Union Commission under the legal directorate must review the African Convention on Cyber Security to ensure that it is an enabler of the efforts to make African economies knowledge and information based economies and in line with the 2063 developmental needs;
* Support the raising of awareness and implementation of the UN Action Plan

**Development Agencies and Civil Society Organisations**

* All development agencies must advocate for inclusion of media freedom, freedom of expression and access to information in the ongoing Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals
* Set up clear programme to offer legal and other support to journalists in distress across the continent;
* Civil society organisations must be develop clear programming to support media freedom and not just use media as a communication tool for their work.

**Media practitioners and Media Owners**

* Media practitioners must organize themselves better at national and continental level and offer support and solidarity to their colleagues and peers in distress in specific countries;
* Media houses must develop and implement comprehensive gender and sexual harassment policies;
* Support women journalists through targeted mentorship programme(s) to enhance retention and career progression;
* Support self-regulation initiatives and partner with universities (national, international) to develop professional training programmes that enhance professionalism and specialization in reporting on different developmental issues.

**Private Sector**

* Encourage multinational corporations to advertise and invest in select media houses in different countries in Africa both in direct broadcasting stations and also in local production houses, distribution.