

Chapter 14

Broadcasting Policy in Botswana: The Case of Botswana Television

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ABSTRACT

The media has been considered an essential tool in propelling social change. Nonetheless, in Botswana, while the media is expected to play a role in the country's development, there exists a broadcasting policy vacuum in that there is no formal media policy to guide the operations of the media. A national television service, Botswana Television (Btv), is used as a case study in this chapter to demonstrate that the lack of media policy in Botswana and possibly other developing countries is generally responsible for poor performance of the broadcast media regarding its role in national development. Such poor performance of the media is reflected by domination of government originated content, domination of foreign content on local television, state control of the media as well as increasing pressure on the media to be more accessible to opposition political parties.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of media policy in this chapter largely refers to principles and decisions of both the government and media professionals that direct the actions of the media. Media policy sets parameters and guidelines through which the media operates (Freedman, 2008). It must be noted that whereas no formal document exists on broadcasting or media policy in Botswana, statutory instruments such as acts and regulations are the main guiding frameworks. Such include the repealed Broadcasting Act (1998), Botswana Communications Regulatory Act (BOCRA, 2012) and Broadcasting Regulations (2004). Additionally, there are actions and decisions of the Botswana Government that guide the operations of the media in Botswana which include directives on coverage of government activities, and national elections to mention but a few. Despite these regulatory frameworks, it can be argued that the media in Botswana operates in a policy vacuum, as there is no national media or broadcasting policy. In view of this, the aim of this chapter is

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to evaluate the extent to which a lack of formal broadcasting policy in Botswana has impacted the successful operations of the media. Drawing on the development communication framework, this chapter focuses specifically on the national television service, Botswana Television (Btv). Within development communication, it is envisaged that the media plays an informational, educational and a unifying role in the process of national development (Amienyi, 2004; Lerner, 1958; Vilanilam, 2009). Subsequently, it is expected that media policies in developing countries' contexts should be framed with the intention to aid social change. Given the lack of a formal media policy in Botswana, this chapter explores possible policy considerations that could guide broadcast media in Botswana, particularly the national television service, Botswana Television (Btv), with the view to improving the role of the broadcast media in national development.

Television broadcasting in Botswana provides an interesting area of study in that the country is considered a democratic exemplar in Africa, as well as an economic success story. Moreover, a national television service was introduced comparatively late in Botswana in 2000. In light of this context, it is intriguing to explore the impact of lack of a broadcasting policy reflective of the democratic and developmental guiding principles of national development in Botswana. Thus the overarching aim of this chapter is to explore the impact of the media policy vacuum in Botswana on the successful operations of the media's role in national development.

This chapter will provide a background on the media sector in Botswana, with the view to articulating a context within which the national television operates. The chapter also explores policy initiatives guiding the operations of the media in Botswana as outlined in the national development plans and other official documentation. The purpose is to explore the policy issues framing "silent" media policy in Botswana, and the continuities and changes in those issues. The evidence, based on a review of various documents, suggests that national planning mostly focused on provision of infrastructure and technology, while content issues and the structure of the media were largely ignored. The chapter also provides an overview of discernable policy initiatives in the communications sector in Botswana. Such relate to media liberalization in the 1990s, to radical changes in the regulatory system that involve rejection of a national broadcasting policy, and to exemption of state media from oversight of an independent regulatory body.

MEDIA SECTOR IN BOTSWANA: AN OVERVIEW

The media is ascribed the role of information dissemination and in this section, the author considers the anatomy of the media in Botswana- broadcasting in general, and Btv in particular, to explain how the media are connected to national development in Botswana. Botswana has a traditional system of communication, *bogosi* or chieftainship, which has had a central role in the country's communication space, by facilitating national development communication. Through *bogosi*, it has been a practice that government officials, incumbent members of parliament, council representatives and bureaucrats mostly from state owned enterprises, address *kgotla* meetings to consult with the public and disseminate information on a non-political basis. The *kgotla* meetings are community- level gatherings presided over by the *Kgosi*, who ensures the issues discussed are non-partisan. This is a challenge in that by their nature, national development discourses are political issues. However, the *bogosi* system faces limitations of audience reach compared to the electronic media in that communication through the *kgotla* is inaccessible to those attending the gatherings. Nonetheless, the system remains a strong consultative forum and an information dissemination channel. In recent years (2010-2016), the current government

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