

The Impact of Political Economic Factors on Television Reporting of Investigative Documentaries in Kenya

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Abstract: The development of investigative journalism in Kenya is quite difficult to explain but it is clear that documentaries have become popular. However, few Kenyan media practitioners and media houses have dared this form of journalism. For those media houses that engage in investigative reporting, the fact that the production of investigative documentaries requires huge amount of financial input, and high-risk engagements the researcher thought it interesting to establish the motive behind some media houses in Kenya consistently engaging in this form of reporting. The study focused particularly on KTN's investigative documentary series Jicho Pevu and the inside Story. The target population for this study were the producers, editors and reporters of the documentaries. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents who would provide the primary data for the study using questionnaires. Data obtained from filled out questionnaires was then analysed quantitatively in line with the research questions and presented in graphs and tables. The study findings led to the conclusion that public opinion and public interest are the most influential political economic factors in the production of investigative documentaries. These could benefit policy makers and media regulatory bodies such as the communications commission of Kenya, the media council of Kenya and the government in discovering the motives behind the investigative documentaries. The findings of the study could also add to the knowledge on media studies on investigative journalism as well as political communication.

Keywords: Investigative Journalism, Political Economic Factors, Television Reporting.

INTRODUCTION

Several scholars have attempted a definition and description of investigative journalism. Most of them agree that it is a style of journalism that goes beyond the usual coverage of incidences, press conferences and press statements; rather, it seeks to unearth the hidden information of vice, malpractice and misdemeanor that may injure society [1]. De Burgh's [2] elaboration on this term generates a bigger picture of understanding this special side of journalism. He said that this kind of journalism involves reporting where journalist believed or realise that the issue required attention because they amount to a dereliction of standards, the situation needs examination whether the situation presented to us is the reality, invite us to be aware of something that we are not hearing about at all, or to care about something that is not being cared about. Northmore [3] defined investigative journalism as one of the journalism genres: It is the reporting through one's own product and initiative; matters of importance which some persons or organisations wish to keep secret. The three basic elements are that the investigation be the work of the reporter, not a report of an investigation made by someone else, that the subject of the story involves something of reasonable

importance to the reader or viewer, and that others are attempting to hide these matters from the public. Classical examples of investigative journalism that resulted in official public investigations include the *Washington Post's* Watergate scandal investigation that forced the resignation of US President Richard Nixon in 1974 [4]. This reporting was only possible through the protection of a source whose identity was kept secret for 30 years [5]. Recent examples of investigative journalism that resulted in official public investigations and prosecution include the 2009 scandal of British MPs inflating their allowances which were investigated by *The Telegraph* that resulted in the jailing of three MPs who were found to have fiddled their expense claims [6]. Investigative journalism also known as muckraking journalism, adversarial journalism, advocacy reporting, public service journalism, watchdog journalism and exposé reporting because of its use of fact gathering to challenge authority and oppose the abuse of power - political, governmental, corporate, or religious - on behalf of ordinary citizens [7]. Stein [8] however sets investigative journalism apart from muckraking as he said investigative journalism is its exposés, the prescriptiveness of and preferred action advocated in muckraking. Obviously

Mokhtar [9] did not agree as he said investigative journalism involve a thorough report to expose public or private behaviour that could be hidden or kept secret from public knowledge. Aucoin [10] also take the same paradigm as he said serious investigative journalism takes a comprehensive, exhaustive look at issues that have significant impact on the lives of the audience. Investigations that use undercover cameras and other investigative techniques to examine issues of limited or negligible impact on most people are not considered by serious investigative journalists to be investigative journalism. This latter type of reporting is driven by entertainment values, not journalism values.

Investigative journalism distinguishes itself from other forms of journalism by its depth and subject matter, often involving crime, political corruption or corporate wrongdoing. It can play an essential role in a country's governance by keeping corporations and government accountable. However, the political and economic environment in some regions of the world present specific challenges for investigative journalists: countries that score low on governance and transparency present particular risks and underline the need to build investigative journalism capacity.

Statement of the Problem

The degree and development of Investigative Journalism varies from one country to another. In Kenya, although it has been practiced for quite some time, investigative journalism has not been fully embraced by many Kenyan media practitioners. Only a few media houses have dared to practice this form of journalism due to its controversial nature. It has been argued that investigative reporting is not a journalistic endeavour because it goes against journalistic ethics. Under the political economy of communication, it is interesting to note that the media and communication systems and content are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labour practices, and government policies. Regardless of the fact that the production of investigative documentaries requires huge amount of financial input, and high-risk engagements it was interesting to the researcher to establish the motive behind some media houses in Kenya consistently engaging in this kind of reporting. The study demonstrates the political economic factors that affect the reporting of investigative documentaries on television in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The production and distribution of social-issue documentaries can have a wide range of significant impact on community organizations, educational institutions, citizens, and policy makers. Unfortunately, the conventional approach to assessing political impact provides only a very limited and inadequate accounting. Most assessments, following a "distribution- centered model," focus primarily on the effects a documentary

may have on individual citizens reached through mainstream distribution channels. Throughout production and distribution, the media house navigates the policy process, interacting along the way with individuals within the relevant issue network: the set of activists and policymakers, at all levels of government, concerned about the issue. Producers and activists seeking to maximize political impact, and scholars seeking to understand political impact, benefit from conceptualizing the production and distribution of a social-issue documentary as an intervention into a policy process. Impact occurs primarily through the linkages between the production company and the components of the relevant issue network. A documentary "works" within an issue network by being linked to activists and policy makers at all levels. The deeper and broader these linkages are, the greater the opportunity for political impact. Individuals are still important, but individual activists and individual policy makers are of more interest than individual citizens. Political impact is most likely to occur when at least one element of the issue network puts the documentary to work within the network, using the documentary to approach other elites, to mobilize their own and other groups, to mobilize individual citizens, and ultimately to change public policy [11].

Although research relying on a distribution centered model of impact is useful, for most films it may actually prove to direct our attention to the circumstances under which film is least likely to have impact. An issue-centered model moves the focus beyond the impact on individual citizens to include two additional arenas of potential impact: (a) activist organizations and social movements and (b) decision makers and political elites. Research on social movements provides important insights into the dynamics of activist groups, their objectives and resources, and the possible roles for film and video. Tarrow's [12] analysis of how mass media become a resource for social movements suggests two possible roles for film: helping new movements gain initial attention and helping "established movements maintain support by bolstering the feeling of status of their members and communicating their activities to their supporters" (p. 127). Gaventa [13] found that participation in the production process can help activist groups communicate internally and refine their objectives, and the distribution of finished films to activist groups can help mobilize and educate existing members [14]. More generally, film also plays a role in the ability of activist groups to develop and sustain "parallel public spaces" that will both mobilize their supporters and challenge the dominant discourse [15].

Social movements continually struggle to create public space for discussion of the issues they think are important and films can become a crucial part of that struggle [16]. Film can be used to create a space

in which citizens can encounter issues. Once produced, organizers and other supportive groups and individuals can use a film to create a space within which citizens can encounter, discuss, and decide to act on the issues raised in the film.

Decision makers and elites represent a second arena of potential impact. It's evident that the production process had an effect on decision makers and elites [17], investigating the effects of investigatory journalism on the policy making process, provide a useful framework that can be adapted for use in for considering the potential impact of documentary film. To assess agenda-building effects, they identify three aspects of agenda building that might be affected: Media/film might affect the priority of an issue, the pace of consideration, and the formulation and content of specific policy proposals for reform (particularity). To assess impact on policy out-comes [18], identify three types of impact: deliberative ("when policy makers hold formal discussions of policy problems and their solutions, such as legislative hearings or executive commissions"), individualistic ("when policy makers apply sanctions against particular persons or entities, including prosecutions, firings, and de- motions"), and substantive ("regulatory, legislative, and/or administrative changes").

METHODOLOGY

To get a proper and deep understanding of the Political Economy of reporting investigative documentaries, the mixed methods approach was employed. According to Cresswell [19], a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem. Quantitative method in the data collection process includes the use of close-ended questions while qualitative methods meanwhile include the analysis of open-ended questions.

Through the design, the respondents were able to provide their responses and their knowledge regarding the subject of investigation. The study focused primarily on KTNs investigative documentary productions *JichoPevu* and *The Inside Story*. Since the study was interested in the political economy of reporting of investigative documentaries, KTN (and by conduit, *JichoPevu/Inside Story*) were ideal for this study because they are arguably the most popular investigative productions currently airing on any Kenyan television channel. In determining the participants for the research, the research objectives and the research questions were considered. The target population for this study was the television personnel who were producers, editors and reporters. The researcher was interested in identifying political economic factors that affect the reporting of investigative documentaries, to establish the impact of

political economic factors on the reporting of investigative documentaries, and determining the implications of reporting investigative documentaries here in Kenya. The aforementioned groups were the ideal respondents for this study because they determined what to be broadcasted and what was avoided based on various reasons. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents who provided the primary data for the study. The researcher sampled producers, editors, cameramen and reporters who routinely work on investigative documentaries from Standard Media Group's *JichoPevu/Inside Story*. The researcher selected three producers, three editors, two reporters. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which enabled the researcher to answer the research questions. The sample being studied was representative of the population [20]. Purposive sampling was preferred because the characteristic of the respondents was already known and their selection determined. The primary data for this study was collected using mixed research methods [21]. The researcher used questionnaires to gain information from producers, editors and reporters involved in the preparation of these investigative documentaries on KTN i.e. *Jicho Pevu and The Inside Story* on the major internal and external political factors that affect the reporting of investigative documentaries, how internal and external political factors impact the reporting of investigative documentaries and the implications of reporting of investigative documentaries. The design preferred in this study allowed respondents to write about their experiences and give information that is generally obtainable through interviews, yet still answered structured close-ended questions. After collecting the data, the researcher was compelled to compile and analyse the results so that a decision could be made regarding the questions being tested. The researcher then named and defined the categories of data collected into meaningful analysable parts. By coding and analysing the data, the researcher used her personal knowledge and experiences as tools to make sense of the material [22]. The analysis of the data was done in line with the research questions such that they are well and exhaustively answered.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research set out to investigate the impact of political economic factors on the reporting of investigative documentaries on television in Kenya. The findings are presented in the following sections.

Political Economic Factors Determining Production of Investigative Documentaries

The research wanted to find out from respondents what they thought are the key factors that determine the production of an investigative piece once a story is selected for production. Respondents were asked to pick more than one political economic factor

(if applicable) determining the production of investigative documentaries.

The figure below shows the political economic factors data collected from respondents-

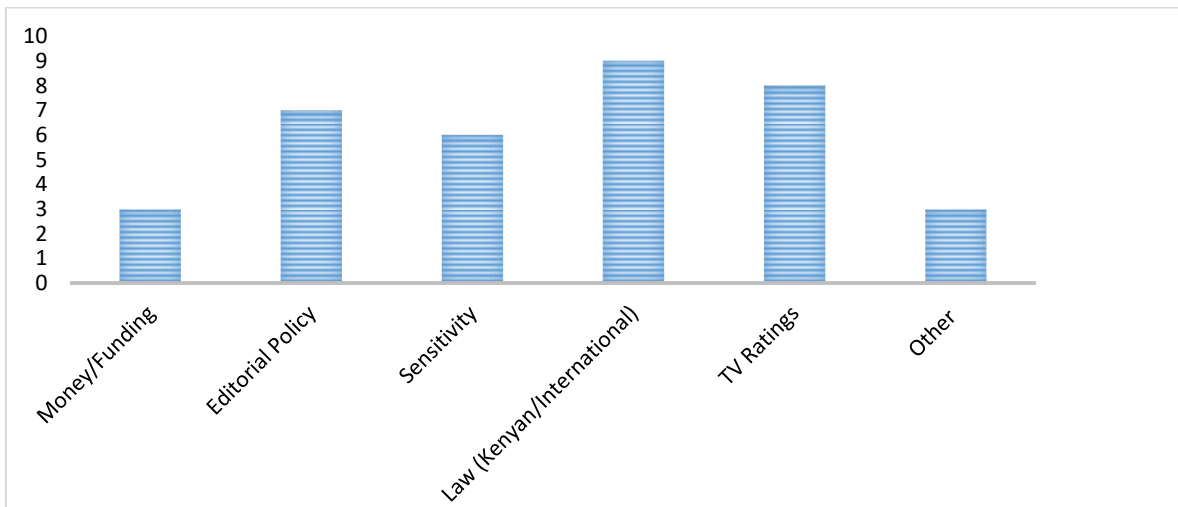


Fig-1: Political Economic Factors

The law, either national or international, was given by 90% of respondents as the major political economic factor that determines the production of investigative documentaries from start to finish. Restrictive laws may mean that media houses can easily be taken to court and may suffer costly defeats that could bankrupt the media house involved. Also, the weakness of legislation to protect whistleblowers and witnesses may hinder production of investigative documentaries. 80% of respondents also thought television ratings are a key determining factor in the production of an investigative documentary. Higher television ratings mean more advertisers, and consequently more advertisers translate to higher revenue. If an investigative piece is not deemed commercially viable, it may well be scrapped in favor of another that draws bigger audiences. Editorial policy and sensitivity were said to be important political economic factors by 70% and 60% of respondents

respectively. Sensitivity of a story may be defined here as a story which touches on national security, cases of rape and gruesome murder. 30% of respondents also gave other political economic factors that determine the production of investigative documentaries, including media ownership, and media regulations. Vested interests from the powers that be may push/coerce media owners to significantly alter the course of an investigative documentary.

Rating the importance of Political Economic Factors

The researcher also asked respondents to rate the political economic factors listed in terms of their importance during the production of investigative documentaries.

The figure below represents the data collected from respondents.

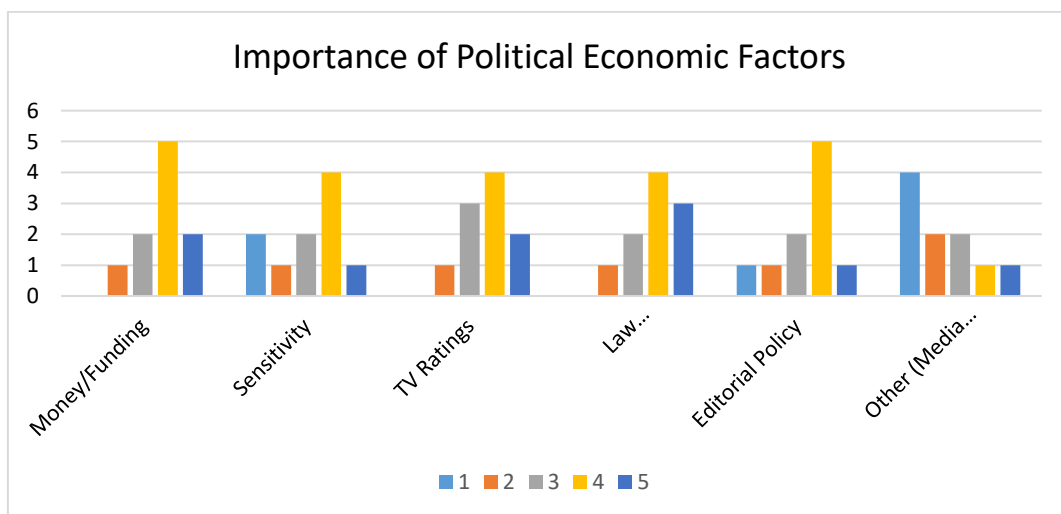


Fig-2: Rating the importance of Political Economic Factors

Going by the ratings given, the law was rated by respondents as the most important political economic factor. The law was given a rating of at least 3 out of 5 by 90% of respondents, a rating of 5 being the most important. At least 30% rated the law 5 out of 5. Editorial policy was also rated highly among respondents by its importance, with 80% giving editorial policy a rating of at least 3/5. 50% of respondents gave editorial policy a rating of 4/5, indicating its value during the consideration for production. Money/funding for the project was also rated at least 3/5 by 90% of respondents but only 20% gave it the highest possible rating in terms of importance. It is plausible that the media houses conducting these kinds of investigative journalism are

willing and able to provide funding for the projects. However, the funding required for the project has to be weighed against the potential benefits that the media house stands to accrue from producing the documentary. If the project doesn't justify the monetary outlay being proposed, then it has to be scrapped. Media ownership and regulations were not considered very important by respondents, with 60% giving these factors a rating of 2/5 or less.

Media house gains from airing investigative documentaries

The research asked respondents to opine, what a media house has to gain from producing and airing investigative documentaries.

Table 1: Gains from airing Investigative Documentaries (Media House)

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percent |
|---|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| Higher television ratings | 2 | 20 | 20 |
| Greater credibility with audiences | 1 | 10 | 30 |
| Enhances the media house's sense of social responsibility | 1 | 10 | 40 |
| Fulfilling the surveillance function of the media | 2 | 20 | 60 |
| Gives the media house an opportunity to set the agenda | 2 | 20 | 80 |
| An opportunity for the media house to influence public policy | 1 | 10 | 90 |
| Provides a reference point for activist groups | 1 | 10 | 100 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 | 100 |

Respondents gave a number of responses that reflected their opinions on what media houses have to gain from airing investigative documentaries. Higher television ratings were given as a gain by 20% of respondents. As explained earlier in this research, higher television ratings seem to be relatively high on the list of considerations that a media house makes. It wouldn't be prudent for a television station to air an investigative documentary that wouldn't draw in significant numbers. Also, respondents thought that by airing investigative documentaries, a media house gains a lot of credibility by virtue of daring to expose the ills that belie government, religion, legislature and other areas of public interest. The media also has a social responsibility to its audiences to expose these ills and airing investigative documentaries was thought to enhance their sense of social responsibility by 10% of respondents. 20% of respondents also thought that by airing investigative documentaries, media houses gain by fulfilling their function of surveillance. The media

house also gets an opportunity to set the agenda by airing investigative documentaries. 10% of respondents thought that airing investigative documentaries serves as an opportunity for the media house to influence public policy while another 10% thought media houses gain from airing investigative documentaries by providing a reference point for activist groups. These findings are supported by Edwards and Chomsky [23] who believes the media system is the result of policies made in the public's name, but often without the public's informed consent. They believe the nature of the media systems established by these policies goes a long way toward explaining the content produced by these media systems.

Journalist gains from airing Investigative Documentaries

The research also asked respondents to opine, what an individual journalist has to gain from producing and airing investigative documentaries.

Table 2: Gains from airing investigative documentaries (Journalist)

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percent |
|---|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| Personal Recognition and Reward | 2 | 20 | 20 |
| Greater credibility with audiences | 1 | 10 | 30 |
| Social justice | 3 | 30 | 60 |
| Fulfilling the surveillance function of the media | 2 | 20 | 80 |
| Gives the journalist an opportunity to set the agenda | 2 | 20 | 100 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 | 100 |

30% of respondents opined that the pursuit of social justice is what journalists have to gain most from producing and airing investigative documentaries. According to the US National Association of Social Workers, social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. With the much vaunted fourth estate tag that the media has, it is imperative that journalists fulfill an obligation to their audiences in pursuit of justice where the three branches of government may fail. Personal recognition and reward were thought by 20% of respondents to be personal motivators for journalists. While it may seem selfish, [24] human motivation theory identifies three motivators inherent in every human being; a need for achievement, a need for affiliation, and a need for power. These investigative journalists may be motivated by achievement, and according to McClelland people motivated by

achievement thrive on overcoming difficult problems and to keep them engaged they need challenging but not impossible projects. 20% of respondents respectively also thought that journalists are individually motivated by fulfilling the surveillance function of the media and an opportunity to set the agenda for their audiences. 10% of respondents thought that journalists are motivated by the opportunity to gain greater credibility with audiences, to produce and air investigative documentaries.

Respondents' Sentiments on Newly Enacted Media Laws

The study sought to find out what respondents felt about the newly enacted media laws and how they would affect the production and airing of investigative documentaries.

Table 3: Media Laws and their effect on Investigative Documentaries

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percent |
|--|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| They are unconstitutional and give government too much control over media | 4 | 40 | 40 |
| They limit freedom of expression and would restrict content of investigative documentaries | 2 | 20 | 60 |
| They regulate the media fairly and don't have any effect on production and airing of investigative documentaries | 1 | 10 | 70 |
| They are draconian and non-progressive and would severely compromise production of investigative documentaries | 3 | 30 | 100 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 | 100 |

The media laws in question are the The Kenya Information Communication (Amendment) Bill (KICA Bill) 2013 and The Media Council Bill 2013. Respondents' generally had negative things to say about the media laws with at least 90% lamenting the provisions in those two bills. 40% of respondents said the laws are unconstitutional and give government too much control over the media; 30% said the laws are draconian, non-progressive and would severely hamper the production and airing of investigative documentaries; while 20% said the laws limit freedom of expression and would restrict the content of investigative documentaries. However, 10% of respondents gave the laws their seal of approval, saying

the laws regulate the media fairly and don't have any effect at all on the production and airing of investigative documentaries.

Investigative Documentaries as Drivers of Change

The research asked respondents to indicate whether they thought an investigative documentary had ever driven change in executive, legislative or judicial agendas, and those who answered yes were asked to elaborate on the particular documentary and the change it had brought about.

The figure below represents the data collected from respondents.

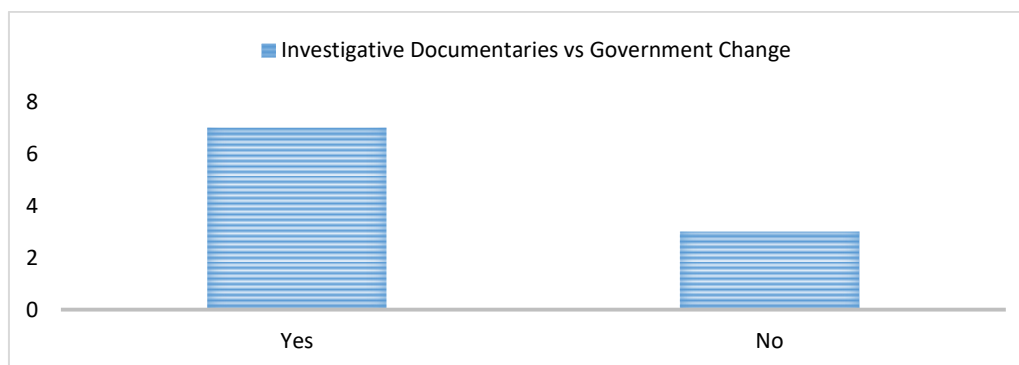


Fig-3: Investigative Documentaries as Drivers of Change

70% of respondents said that indeed an investigative documentary has helped to drive change in executive, legislative and judicial agendas, while 30% of respondents said investigative documentaries had not helped bring change in government agendas. The

elaborations the respondents who said “yes” gave are presented in the table below. It is however important to note that the actual change that respondents indicated may not be objectively measurable using research tools.

Table 4: Investigative Documentaries as Change Drivers

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative Percent |
|--|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| KTN exposé on the sale of the Grand Regency Hotel, led to a parliamentary vote of no confidence in Finance minister Amos Kimunya | 1 | 14.3 | 14.3 |
| BBC News Night program on Anglo-leasing corruption allegations that led to government inquiries and resignations | 1 | 14.3 | 28.6 |
| KTN exposé on the execution of Erastus Chemorei which led to an inquest into his death and the drug trade in Kenya | 1 | 14.3 | 42.9 |
| JichoPevu/Inside Story on alleged government mercenaries ArturMargaryan and ArturSargsyan that led to investigations on their activities in Kenya | 2 | 28.5 | 71.4 |
| KTN documentaries on radicalization of youths at the Coast that directly or indirectly led to killings of radical sheiks and more exposés | 1 | 14.3 | 85.7 |
| Investigative documentary detailing on the corruption in the judiciary, eventually leading to the setting up of the judges and magistrates vetting board | 1 | 14.3 | 100 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 100 | 100 |

Respondents listed a number of investigative documentaries, mostly presumably done by KTN, the television station that this study focused on. The one exception was the BBC News Night documentary that featured former Governance and Ethics permanent secretary John Githongo, making corruption allegations against a number of ministers in the then government. A number of other investigative documentaries were given by respondents as drivers of change in governmental agenda, including the documentary on the impropriety that characterized the sale of the Grand Regency Hotel; the extra-judicial killing of Erastus Chemorei; the documentary on the illegal, yet, government-sponsored activities of two Armenian mercenaries; the radicalization of youths into terror groups such as *Al Shabaabin* Coast province; and the documentary on corrupt activities in the judiciary.

CONCLUSION

In lieu of the above summary, it was evident that a lot of political economic factors influence the production and airing of investigative documentaries. The most important consideration it seems was public opinion and public interest. Therefore, a conclusion can be made that an investigative documentary lives and dies with the interest it would generate from the public. The political economic environment is also critical to the production of investigative documentaries. If the environment is not conducive, production would be impossible. The newly enacted media laws are an especially major area of concern for media practitioners as they would severely limit the scope and depth of

investigative documentaries. However much gains previous investigative documentaries have made, it is important that future productions ensure the standards of quality are raised such that they are better and more effective drivers of change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The decision makers on investigative documentaries to be produced need to increase the scope and depth of investigative documentaries so their credibility won't be questioned.
- During production of investigative documentaries, individual journalists should ensure they adhere to media regulations so they won't fall victim to non-compliance.
- Journalists should maintain a high level of integrity when conducting investigative journalism, because any accusations of impropriety may render the exposé moot.
- The government and regulatory bodies should ensure that freedom of expression is not in any way limited, because without the media to put checks and balances on the government, a growing democracy like Kenya's may regress and turn government into a shambles.
- Editorial policies should also allow individual journalists to create independent angles for their investigative documentaries, removing shackles that may come from media owners, producers or senior editors.

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