CODESRIA

Editorial

Revisiting Communication and Change Processes in Africa

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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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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 telecommunications 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.