

## Chapter 5

# The Role of the Media

We were keenly aware that the transition from a one-party to a multi-party system involved more than the liberalisation of political choice – it also involved giving people the means to make that choice an informed one, thus enabling them to fully participate in the democratic process. During any campaign period, it is important therefore, that the public has access to information on the nature and policies of various political parties and other interest groups, and that a general public airing and discussion of the issues is encouraged. We therefore paid close attention to the role of the media during the campaign.

Before our arrival we had learnt that the media in Tanzania had been almost entirely state-owned under the one-party system, the only other media outlets being newspapers belonging to the CCM. We learnt that since the liberalisation process had begun in 1992, privately owned radio stations and newspapers had been established. In addition, where no television stations had existed before, except in Zanzibar, three stations had now been set up, two of them privately owned.

It is premature, however, to talk about a flowering of the media in Tanzania. The vast majority of people, especially in the rural areas, continue to rely on the state-owned radio station, Radio Tanzania, for their information; one estimate we received was that radio was the source of about 90 per cent of news for Tanzanians. In contrast, the circulation of the Swahili and English newspapers was confined to urban areas and television services on the mainland were restricted to the coastal regions.

### Guidelines for the Conduct of the Media

The important role of the media, in particular the state-owned media, was recognised when the Elections Act was amended in 1995. Under Section 53 of the Act as amended, the presidential candidates and political parties participating in elections were given the 'right to use' the state radio and broadcasting service during the official campaign period. The Act also directed the NEC to co-ordinate the use of these broadcasting rights.

In addition, the Act declared that state-owned print media was to be impartial when publishing information on the electoral process and should refrain from discriminating against any candidates in the amount of space dedicated to them. Under the Act, the NEC could issue directives to state-owned media on covering elections.

The NEC issued its guidelines for elections coverage by state-owned media. Under these guidelines, state-owned media were to report factual happenings accurately and without bias (with a clear distinction between what was news reporting and what was comment), and to report any controversial public issues by fairly representing all the opposing sides. These guidelines are at *Annex VIII*.

The NEC also issued guidelines to the private media in which it urged, among other things, fair reporting, a hearing for all sides on controversial issues and access to the broadcast media for a 'reasonable' amount of time, and at no cost, for political parties wishing to make political advertisements. These guidelines are also at *Annex IX*.

We monitored the performance of the media during the campaign and relied on the work of the Association of Journalists and Media Workers (AJM) which had set up a team to monitor the performance of both the public and private media during this period. This monitoring group worked under the general umbrella of the Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee (TEMCO) which had received some funding from external sources.

The monitoring group issued bulletins weekly after analysing data from a number of centres throughout Tanzania. While we did not necessarily agree with the conclusions drawn by this group, we were impressed with the data they collected.

### State-Owned Media

Given the importance of radio in transmitting information, we paid special attention to Radio Tanzania. Monitoring of the Swahili news bulletins of Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD) showed that the CCM and its presidential candidate dominated the bulletins in the first two weeks of the campaign. In Week Two, 63 per cent of the news stories were on the CCM and 53 per cent on its presidential candidate, against 25 per cent for the NCCR-Mageuzi and 20 per cent for its presidential candidate. By Week Seven, near the end of the campaign, airtime for these two parties and the CUF, and their presidential candidates, had comfortably evened out, each taking between 19 and 31 per cent of the news bulletins.

We are aware of the dangers of relying on raw statistics alone. Indeed, the monitoring group itself records that bulletins on Opposition parties were often more unfavourable than those on the CCM. Representatives of the political parties we met both in Dar es Salaam and in the regions also complained of treatment that was not even-handed. It is clear, even from the monitoring group's findings, that many of the 10 other parties contesting parliamentary seats were squeezed out of the airwaves.

The NEC guidelines, which stipulated that state-owned media should give all political parties, free of charge and on an equal basis, access to radio time, appear to have produced mixed results. We had been told by the NEC that each party had been allocated three 15-minute slots for free political advertising. We understand that many of the smaller parties did not take up the offer. Some claimed that they did not know about it. A TEMCO representative told us that these broadcasts were inadequately advertised to the public and that if they were aired after prime time, few people would be tuned in. We heard one complaint that while one party was allowed to present what it liked, others were subjected to a question and answer session and they therefore did not regard it as free advertising. Opposition parties in particular said that the three 15-minute slots were inadequate for them.

### The Private Media

The emergence of privately owned television and radio stations and newspapers in the past three years augurs well for a future in which an environment of public discussion of issues can be nurtured. We were pleased to see that in three years, privately owned Swahili and English newspapers were so obviously taking to the idea of putting forward alternative views.

CCM representatives complained to us that a considerable number of these papers were anti-CCM although they agreed that their own party newspaper, *Uhuru*, had sold well for many years.

Local journalists told us that the private media industry was constrained by the continuing existence of various media and other laws, such as the Newspaper Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Sedition Act under which editors, journalists and their organisations faced severe penalties if they infringed the law. They admitted that the media had not yet shaken off the habits of years of one-party rule and were still very used to taking orders and passing them on instead of developing vigorous independent editorial policies.

Although a number of private radio stations had been established in 1995, none could match the reach of RTD, as by law they could only broadcast on FM and thus could reach fewer people.

Television Dar es Salaam (DTV) started the campaign period devoting up to 40 per cent of its news stories to the CCM or its presidential candidate. By Week Two, this had dropped to 21 per cent.

On balance, we felt that although the major political parties were able to put their views across in one forum or another, the vast majority of Tanzanians remained tied to their single source of news, the state-owned Radio Tanzania.