

Increasing media bias bad for business

REPORTING A study has noted that there is a significant increase in biased reporting and that business reporting in Kiswahili papers is low

By Felix Lazaro
BusinessWeek Reporter

Dar es Salaam. Tanzania newspapers are doing little to campaign for reform in the business environment and an increased bias in business reporting caused by lack of skills and training has become a major concern.

A study titled 'Evaluating the Quality of Business Journalism in Tanzania' Newspaper (2012)' recently noted that there is a significant increase in biased reporting. The report flags the tendency as a business press increasingly polarising and lacking objectivity will fail to properly inform the nation on essential public matters such as economic growth and job creation.

Media bias describes a real or perceived bias of journalists in the selection of events which will be reported and how they will be covered.

It occurs when the reporting is inaccurate or one-sided because of ideology, political favouritism, reliance on limited sources (not treating both sides equally), or other factors such as simply the

lack of training in understanding issues of the business environment. Bias can show up in coverage (or lack thereof) or in the content and analysis of stories.

The study annually commissioned to Serengeti Advisers Limited by BEST AC, noted that "the neutrality score dropped very significantly" compared to 2011. According to the study, business articles have improved in style but their substance-depth, neutrality, number and types of sources remain problematic.

It also noted that business reporting in the Kiswahili language press is of a lower quality than that in the English language press.

According to Mr Aidan Eyakuze, director of Serengeti Advisers Limited, 70 per cent of the Kiswahili sample scored 'poor', while 30 per cent of English scored 'poor'. Where 30 per cent of Kiswahili sample scored average, 71 per cent of English sample scored 'average' or 'good.'

"The increase in sample size suggests that the overall state of Tanzania's business journalism is bunched around a mean without significance overall variance," he told editors and other media stakeholders recently.

In 2008, BEST-AC commissioned Serengeti Advisers Limited for the first time to make an analysis of the media sector in Tanzania to identify key con-



Some of the Dar es Salaam-based journalists talk to Samsung Mobile Tanzania distribution manager, Sylvester Manyara (in Specs) about the company's Christmas and New Year Promotional drive in the city recently. A recent study has shown that the media is publishing few analytical business articles. PHOTO | FILE

straints to its playing a more effective role in business environment reform. The latest report commissioned for the fourth year, reviews the quality of news articles covering the business environment in six daily newspapers, for the first time also including two Kiswahili dailies..

This year a sample of sixty articles were studied. The coverage of business articles in Kiswahili papers was more superficial, mainly covering issues of macroeconomics, corporate and international business, and little on the reality of the millions of smaller scale entrepreneurs in Tanzania.

Criteria such as article lengths, journalistic quality and style, their placements in papers and sources were taken into consideration. The study attributed the assessed mediocre quality to a limited knowledge of the business environment and the reality of doing business in Tanzania among journalists, media managers and owners.

According to Eyakuze, this year three major weaknesses were identified in particular, namely poor media coverage of business issues, particularly in Kiswahili language media; private sector organisations (PSOs) lacked skills to effectively use media in information dissemination and advocacy and government at ministerial, departmental and agency level lacked skills and commitment to interact with the media.

It was established that despite having communication departments, government was withholding crucial information for public consumption.

With the private sector, the study noted that structures were

MORE INFO: COMMON MEDIA

Bias through selection and omission
Bias through placement
Bias through use of names and titles
Bias through statistics and crowd counts
Bias by source control
Bias by Word Choice
What can be done to tame media bias?

BACKGROUND: BEST-AC EFFORTS TO CORRECT BIAS

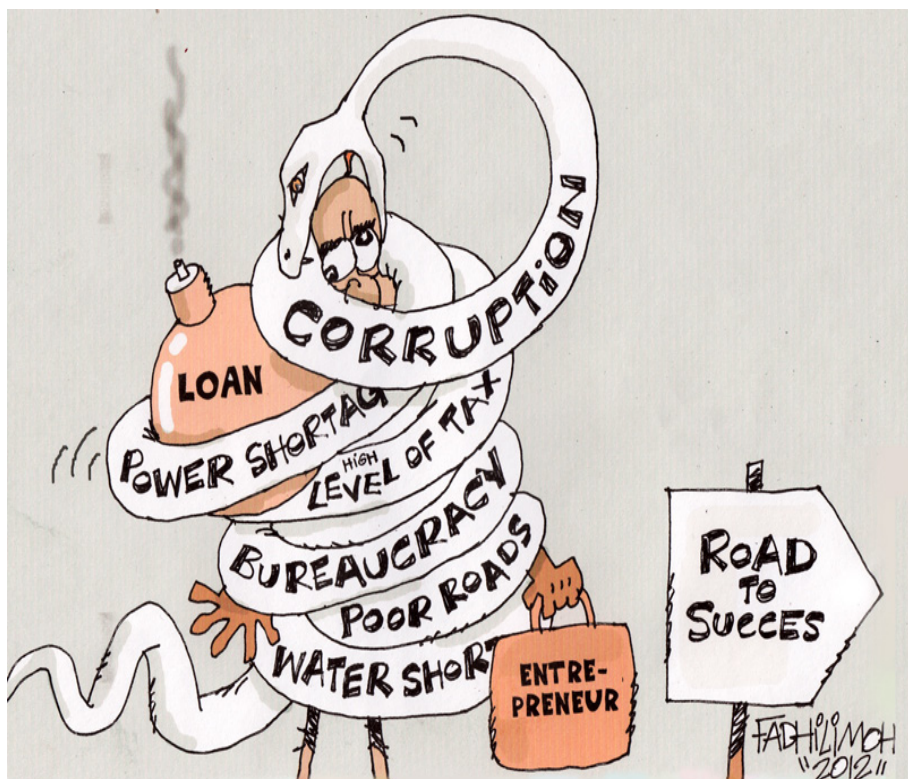
BEST AC on January 17th organized a workshop for media stakeholders that was predominantly attended by managing editors of mainstream print press media. The meeting discussed the Quality of Business Journalism in Tanzania's Newspapers 2012. There was a consensus that improving the quality of business reporting for the English and Kiswahili media was paramount. Editors had various suggestions on what should be done, including mentoring, training and setting up standards of business journalism in the country. Best-ac.org will publish a report about the workshop in the near future.

As a result of the first findings in 2008, BEST AC set out to provide support to gradually enhance the capacity of private sector organisations and the media to communicate more effectively on private sector issues. Serengeti Advisers developed the tools to analyse the quality of newspaper articles to assist BEST-AC to annually monitor coverage of the business environment in Tanzania's print media. The report, 'Evaluating the Quality of Business Journalism in Tanzania's Newspapers (2012)' can be downloaded at www.best-ac.org.

Dangers of media bias

In a nutshell the media has the responsibility to provide the public with accurate facts on which they can base their own opinions and actions. Failure to do this may cause social disharmony as the people may act based on biased media reports.

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