

# Research Summary

## Media's Role in Accountability in Kenya



### Summary

- *Sema Kenya* (Speak Kenya) is a BBC Media Action TV and radio programme that aims to provide a constructive platform for Kenyans both to voice their concerns about issues that affect them and to directly address their politicians and public officials. The programme is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Global Grant to BBC Media Action.
- BBC Media Action research shows Kenyans trust the media and feel it plays an important role in the systems of governance, particularly around election time and in holding leaders to account.
- Governance and media experts believe the media needs to do more to educate citizens and enable Kenyans to address their leaders, particularly on sensitive issues such as tribalism.

### Context

With the finalisation of a new constitution in 2010, expectations are high that Kenya now has a solid foundation on which to build a further stable and inclusive democracy and improve accountability. The widespread post-election violence of 2007 and 2008 brought into sharp focus the need for reform in government and accountability systems in Kenya. While media played a central role in both fuelling and calming the violence that erupted following the 2007 elections, Kenyans and international observers hope that the powerful relationship between media and governance can be leveraged to provide opportunities for greater accountability in the future.

### The project

*Sema Kenya* is a weekly factual discussion programme broadcast on national TV and radio in the Kiswahili language. The programme provides opportunities for Kenyans all over the country to engage their leaders in dialogue by directly questioning them on important issues that affect their lives. Season one of *Sema Kenya* launched in October 2012 and ran until the end of March 2013. The show will return later in 2013 with a second season. The programme travels around the country with each episode shot in a different location, enabling maximum engagement with diverse audiences. Also, BBC Media Action has established partnerships with selected radio stations to improve each station's overall staff capacity to deliver governance programming.



### Research Methodology

In the second half of 2012, BBC Media Action conducted baseline research for the *Sema Kenya* project consisting of a nationally representative quantitative survey of 3,000 Kenyan adults aged 15+ and in-depth interviews with a panel of 14 media and governance experts in Kenya. The research explored governance and accountability in the Kenyan context. Over the life of the project further research will be conducted to explore the impact of the broadcast TV and radio programmes.

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### Findings

The results of the quantitative survey highlight the value of the media to Kenyans and the trust they place in it. Trust of the media is high relative to other information sources: 74% of Kenyans say they trust radio for information on politics and current affairs and 69% say they trust television, whereas only 31% say they trust government officials.

Kenyans acknowledge the role that the media already plays in accountability. They rank the media alongside the new constitution for the importance of its role in holding government to account. Three quarters (76%) of survey respondents agree that media is playing an important role in holding government to account, 77% agree that this is the case with the new constitution. The media is playing this role by providing opportunities to question government officials (68% agree) and providing Kenyans with the opportunity to receive answers and explanations on the decisions and actions their leaders take (72% agree).

The media continues to exert considerable influence during election times; two thirds (67%) of Kenyans report that information and debate in the media influences their vote. Nonetheless, media and governance experts state that decision makers are still reluctant to engage with the populace in general and specifically through the media, and that this limits the media's impact. They also feel the media needs to do more to represent marginalised groups.

Sensitive issues such as tribalism are often left out of the media debate, which according to experts means that the media often fails to address important issues. There was also discussion from experts who felt that the media needs to do more to educate citizens in a meaningful and long-term way.

### Implications



Both Kenyan adults and media experts recognise the role of media in improving accountability. Moreover, audiences and experts expect the media to play a role in holding leaders to account and in working for and educating ordinary citizens.

These results show that there is a space and demand for programming which goes further than what currently exists in educating citizens and supporting them to hold leaders to account.

They also suggest that the media can better support citizens to raise issues that matter, even around sensitive topics such as tribalism.

For more information about our research in Kenya, please see "Understanding Accountability in Kenya."

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