



2nd November 2016

MEDIA SERVICES ACT, VOICES OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS MATTER

The Bill to enact a law to guide and regulate media services in Tanzania is scheduled for final reading and passage into law in the parliament towards the end of this week. Much as most stakeholders seem to welcome the law, there appears to be strong disagreement regarding as to when it should be passed. One side says it must be passed now and another asks for more time until February 2017.

For some strange reasons, the debate about timing is only between the media fraternity on one side, and the government and National Assembly on the other. It already appears, though, that if these two sides agree with each other then the law is acceptable and can be passed.

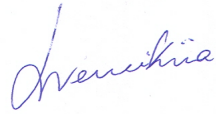
The process seems to flout democratic principles. Members of Parliament are supposed to work on behalf of citizens, whom they ideally represent in the parliament. The chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee responsible for the Bill, however, seems to have already decided (on behalf of the Parliament) that the Bill must sail through with or without full consent of all stakeholders.

In the media services sector, media practitioners are only conduits of news or information. To complete the equation, there must be newsmakers and consumers (citizens). We are unsure if these two categories of stakeholders have been adequately consulted.

Again, the government and National Assembly say the process started in 1993 and therefore the Bill must be passed now. Media practitioners agree that the process has taken long but see no harm for additional three months from now. Sikika is of the view that this particular Bill is not 100% the same Bill which was presented previously and that this Bill was only made public on 16th of September 2016.

Sikika is therefore supporting the request for the Bill to be brought to the house for the final reading and passage in February 2017 for the following reasons;

1. To allow time for all stakeholders who have an interest in the Media Services Bill to understand the content and consult amongst and between themselves.
2. To allow the National Assembly to rethink its position in this process, that they work on behalf of citizens.
3. To consult stakeholders beyond media practitioners.
4. To allow time for parties involved resolving their current differences, even if they finally politely agree to disagree on some issues in the Bill.



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