

Media to get involved in regional integration

By [Steven Candia](#)

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State minister for East African Community (EAC) affairs, Shem Bageine, has pledged to support high level participation of the media in the forthcoming EAC Heads of State (HoS) summit, slated for November.

The minister was responding to a request by media gurus, professionals and owners in the region to be included on the agenda of the summit to discuss regional integration and deepen the process. The media gurus are unanimous that the media has a far bigger role to play in the integration process, way beyond mere reporting.

"Your request to participate in the summit has been taken note of and I will take it to the responsible committee to be included on the agenda. I do not see any harm in you participating," Bageine said adding "We should not look at the press as enemies."

Stemming from their agreed position, the media gurus and professionals among others agreed to defer their annual media summit normally held in August to November so as to coincide with the EAC HoS Summit and lobby for their inclusion on the agenda. Meeting at the Imperial Royale Hotel, they elected a five member committee, drawn from each member state to thrash out issues that they will present should they be included on the agenda of the HoS Summit.

Speaking at the closure of the EAC preparatory meeting for the sixth media summit, Bageine also launched the EAC/East Africa Business Council (EABC) Media awards, 2013, urging journalists in the region covering the EAC integration to enter the lucrative competition. Last year's winner walked away with US\$ 3000 (about sh7.8m) and an iPad while the first runner up bagged US\$ 2500 (about sh6.5m) and a laptop.

Minister Shem Bageine and the Vision Group CEO Robert Kabushenga join the rest of the media chiefs in a group photo.

The decision to push for a higher level participation of the media comes against a background of a proposal by the EAC Secretary General, Dr. Richard Sezibera to restructure the organisation of the media summits with effect from this year by allowing the media fraternity to take charge and ownership of the event. The move is expected to turn the summit and the awards into some of the most prestigious and respected events for journalists in the region.

Chief executive officers of media houses, media executives, publishers, editors, prominent media personalities and practitioners in the region agreed that there was need for the media to go beyond reporting on the regional integration process.

"We need to move beyond reporting but become active players for the betterment of our people and the region. I do hope

that as we move forward that we will participate in the next summit with greater tangible output," Ezekiel Mutua of the Kenya Media Council (KMC).

Wednesdays meeting drew together top decision makers of some of the biggest media houses in the region - Vision Group, Standard Group, Nation Media Group, Citizen Television, Independent Television (ITV), members of regulatory bodies, media associations and academicians from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. It is this caliber that will interact with the regional HoS.

When the chairman of the meeting, Robert Kabushenga, who is also the CEO Vision Group, posed the question as to whether the summit should be differed to November the answer was unanimous. "Yes."

However, as members agreed to lobby for inclusion on the agenda of the HoS summit, they were quick to caution on the need to evolve real issues that they would like to raise and discuss with the Heads of State in regard to integration.

"What are the issues that we would like to table? That is what we need to thrash out," Grace Munjuri of the Media Council of Kenya said.

Alex Asiimwe, the CEO Daily Monitor which is part of the NMG pointed out a number of challenges to the integration process singling out an awareness gap among others. "If we set an agenda then the people will probably take us serious.

We need to debate how to bridge that information gap and also create a favorable climate."

Jenerali Ulimwengu, from Tanzania, noted that the issues to be discussed were weighty and needed more time for meaningful discussion. Yvonne Msemembo, the head of news and current affairs on ITV called for a regional platform the meets regularly. "We also need to brand East Africa integration at the East African secretariat."

Claudine DeLucco, the Deputy Director General of Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) pledged to support the push for higher involvement but cautioned of external force out to undermine efforts by the region to integrate, calling on foreign missions of member states to do more.

"Let us use the diaspora and our embassies to talk more about the integration process," DeLucco said.

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