

To our broadcasters: We need appropriate content

By [Martin Semukanya](#)

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Just a decade ago, Rwanda's airwaves were opened making it possible for private broadcasters to operate, marking the revolution in the broadcasting sector.



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Ten years down the road, with over 20 privately owned radio stations and migration from analogue to digital broadcasting, Rwandans have now (since early 2014) started to view local private television channels. There are currently four private TV stations projected to reach eight or ten before the end of this year.

The opening of airwaves and digital migration as well as media policies are laudable achievements, but sadly, content is not. Yet content is king when it comes to a sound broadcasting industry.

Across the world broadcasting is considered as an economic sector which advances development and alleviates poverty. Experts argue that a vibrant broadcasting sector can help foster the growth of its creative community and consumer markets.

The onus now on content providers

After the policies and enabling infrastructure have been put in place, the onus is now on content providers to deliver content which is relevant to Rwanda's development agenda across the board. That content cannot help to develop a vibrant Rwandan broadcasting sector without considering local community and relevance.

While it is the right of every broadcaster to define its own editorial line and establish its programming, content should be defined based on informed decisions and should take into consideration other key factors such as interest of the general public (audience) as well as the market, hence comes in the role of the regulator.

Local content

It has become international norm for countries to regulate and define a percentage of local content which in some cases varies between 60-70%.

But before going into quotas, which is currently set at 50% by Rwanda's regulator, local content should properly be defined. The current rule provides that anything produced by a citizen is local content. Some will disagree.

According to UNESCO local content is "An expression and communication of a community's locally generated, owned and adapted knowledge and experience that is relevant to the community's situation".

These two words, community and relevancy, cannot be stressed more.

A recent study by the Rwanda Media High Council on local content (the first of its kind) indicates that there are more questions than answers, but it can help discussions aiming at solutions.

These discussions should not overlook TV and radio independent producers as they are key stakeholders on this matter of local content.

Relevant content

Cheap has been the order of the day and keeps impacting on the quality of content from all broadcasters. Retrieving web materials on any foreign topic (sports, fashion, music, films) to discuss them on air is now the trend. Greetings (gusuhuza) on air and poorly researched talk shows are part of daily broadcasts. These are some examples of low quality content.

Broadcasters and other partners, including independent producers, should identify and choose practical measures to make content decisions tailor-made for the people of Rwanda.

As market driven-competition grows it is hoped that broadcasters will invest more in high quality content and diversity in genres.

For broadcasting content to keep the progress momentum, stakeholders must establish regular surveys and monitor agreed upon content guidelines.

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