Public Broadcasting in Africa Series: Uganda

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The report is the result of research that started in 2008 with the aim of collecting, collating and writing up information about regulation, ownership, access, performance of broadcasting as well as prospects for public broadcast reform in Africa. The Uganda report is part of an eleven-country survey of African broadcast media. The main reason for conducting the research is to contribute to Africa’s democratic consolidation.

Many African countries have made significant gains in building democratic systems of governance that are based on popular control of decision-making and in which citizens are treated as equals. Availability and access to information by a greater number of citizens is a critical part of a functioning democracy and a country’s development. The role of a public broadcaster as a vehicle through which objective information and diverse perspectives are transmitted into the public domain cannot be overstated.

A number of countries are currently undertaking public broadcast media reforms that aim to improve service delivery and accountability to citizens. Such reforms draw from evolving African and global standards regarding media and broadcast media in particular. The survey instrument that was developed in consultation with African media experts and others from other parts of the world is largely based on agreements, conventions, charters and declarations regarding media that have been developed at regional and continental levels in Africa.

The survey of broadcast media in Africa was initiated by two projects of the Open Society Institute (OSI), the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP) and the Network Media Program (NMP), working with the African members of the Soros foundation network – in East Africa, the Open Society Initiative for East Africa (OSIEA). The research was carried out by Dr George W. Lugalambi who has worked in different capacities in the media in Uganda and heads the Mass Communication Department at Makerere University. He was assisted by Dr Peter G. Mwesige, a journalist, media scholar, and consultant, who also edited the report. The two would like to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Irene Nabisere, Rachel Chelimo and Moreen Katushabe. The project was overseen by an editor-in-
chief, Hendrik Bussiek, a media consultant with extensive broadcasting experience in Africa and globally.

It is our hope that the research will clear some of the misconceptions about public broadcasters. In its simplest definition a ‘public broadcasting service’ is a broadcaster that serves the public as a whole and is accountable to the public as a whole. Yet in most instances what is referred to as a public broadcaster is in fact a state broadcaster: this research aims to help the process of aiding the transformation of Africa’s public broadcasters into media worthy of the name.

Ozias Tungwarara
Director, AfriMAP