

Policy Forum dissatisfied with Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation censorship

Policy Forum wishes to express disquiet over the removal of its TV and radio spots from TBC for what the broadcaster termed as infringement of its standards of impartiality as set in its election guidelines.

As a network of over 100 civil society organizations that seek enhanced democratic, transparent and accountable governance and strives to increase informed citizen participation in national policy processes, Policy Forum launched a non-partisan TV and radio advocacy campaign calling for transparency in the mining sector and to inform public discourse so that a more aware citizenry can make informed voting choices during the general elections.

The campaign was not aimed at supporting or opposing any candidate for office and was a call for citizens and leaders alike to support transparency and public engagement in the sector.

We believe that to further development and reduce poverty, public resources need to be acquired, allocated and spent equitably and effectively. This is far more likely when government is transparent about how public money is acquired and spent, and when citizens have a voice in how their resources are prioritized and allocated. We also believe that as stakeholders in development, we should actively promote values of transparency within government

Minerals are part of our natural resource wealth in Tanzania and revenue emanating from them constitutes public money. There has been concern in recent years that our mining sector is not contributing enough to the improvement of lives of the poor and that it provides a disproportional share of the benefits of exploitation to international companies. The fact that the mining contracts, or development agreements have been kept out of the public scrutiny has only exacerbated matters. In our view, one way of solving this problem of public distrust would be for government to enhance transparency about revenues obtained from the extractive industries. Indeed, Tanzania has applied to join and has been accepted as a candidate country in Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). We commend the government for this move that will help enhance public understanding of government revenues, improve public debate and inform decisions regarding appropriate expenditure options for our development.

Hence, we wish to express our disquiet after the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) removed our TV and radio spots from their broadcasts despite a contract we signed with them.

Civil Society Organisations highly appreciate the importance of media as the fourth estate in their advocacy work. Policy Forum, indeed, believes that as we strive for a successful liberal economy, we also need an expanded space for discourse, growth of diversity and pluralism and the protection of the public's right to know. The media is

crucial in facilitating these and TBC, as a public broadcaster, also has a critical role to play.

Policy Forum is also of the view that TBC as a public broadcaster should disseminate both internally produced and outsourced content that is balanced and reflects the demography, values and interests of the public it serves. Mining as an issue of national interest affecting a myriad of constituencies including local communities where the mines exist, is a good example of such content. Transparency and accountability are values we all endeavor to promote and sustain. The citizens' right to access revenue information like how much the government receives from the mining sector and how it plans to spend it enables them to hold government accountable for its misuse.

So as TBC continues to strive for the enlightenment and enrichment of the public through information provision, it has to bear in mind the responsibility it has to its tax-paying audiences. This includes addressing the interests and needs of civic and social organizations as well as the constituencies they serve.

The media is crucial in promoting an educated, informed and active society whereby citizens partake in democratic and policy making processes as well as are empowered to self-organise to realize improvements in their lives.

Policy Forum, therefore, deems the TBC action to censor its adverts for the reason the corporation explicates, as misconceived. In the future, we hope, TBC will refrain from stifling content that aims to promote the discourse of critical social issues, be it from Policy Forum or any other civil society organization.



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The TV advert can be seen at: <http://www.policyforum-tz.org/node/7604>