



Policy Brief - Need for Review of the Information and Broadcasting Policy, 2003

Key summary



LHRC reviewed the Media and Broadcasting Policy of 2003 and established that the policy is no longer adequate to address the contemporary realities of Tanzania's media and broadcasting sector. Significant developments in technology, digital media, online platforms, media ownership, professional standards, access to information, and the regulatory environment prompted to have new policy.

LHRC calls for the comprehensive review and replacement of the 2003 Policy with a new Information and Broadcasting Policy of Tanzania, 2026.

The new policy should provide a modern, rights-based and inclusive framework that protects freedom of expression and access to information, promotes media professionalism and independence, supports technological innovation and investment, protects journalists, and recognizes the media sector as an important contributor to democratic governance and national development.

Key priority for reforms;

	Recognizing digital media, online platforms and technological convergence.
	Strengthening freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information.
	Protecting the safety and security of journalists.
	Addressing gender, disability and other forms of exclusion within the media sector.

Other key areas

- ⇒ Promoting media professionalism, ethical standards and capacity building.
- ⇒ Reforming media ownership, licensing and investment frameworks.
- ⇒ Establishing an independent and effective Media Council.
- ⇒ Strengthening the contribution of the media sector to economic, social, cultural and democratic development.

2. Background of the Problem

The Media and Broadcasting Policy of 2003 was developed at a time when Tanzania’s media environment was predominantly characterised by traditional print and broadcast media. Since then, the sector has undergone substantial transformation due to the expansion of the internet, social media, online journalism, digital broadcasting and other forms of technology-enabled information dissemination.

The policy has therefore become outdated in several respects. It does not sufficiently respond to the contemporary digital media environment, does not adequately address emerging challenges affecting journalists and media institutions, and does not reflect the current legal and regulatory framework.

For example, the 2003 Policy refers to the Newspaper Act of 1976, which was subsequently repealed by the Media Services Act, 2016.

The policy also fails to adequately incorporate important developments such as the Access to Information Act, 2016, subsequent broadcasting and internet-content regulations, and relevant international and regional human rights standards.

The transformation of the media sector is also demonstrated by the rapid growth of internet and social media use in Tanzania. According to the Media Council of Tanzania’s State of the Media Report 2022–2023, Tanzania had approximately 21 million internet users by early 2023, representing an internet penetration rate of 31.6 percent, while approximately 4.90 million people were using social media.

These developments demonstrate the need for a policy framework that is responsive to technological change, protects fundamental rights and provides an enabling environment for a professional, independent and sustainable media sector.

3. Problem Description

The continued application of the 2003 Policy creates several challenges for the development and regulation of Tanzania’s media and broadcasting sector.

First, the policy does not adequately define contemporary concepts such as “media,” “broadcasting,” digital media and digital content delivery. This creates uncertainty in interpretation, regulation and enforcement.

Second, the policy was developed before the widespread adoption of social media, online journalism, digital broadcasting and other

Third, the policy does not sufficiently recognise the role of the media as a driver of economic growth, education, cultural development, poverty reduction, equal opportunities, public participation and democratic governance.

Fourth, despite the growth in the number of media outlets, concerns remain regarding professionalism, ethical standards, working conditions, safety and the quality of journalism. The existing policy provides inadequate responses to these challenges.

Fifth, journalists with disabilities, women journalists and other marginalised groups continue to face barriers

internet-based platforms. It therefore does not adequately address the realities of modern information dissemination through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, websites and other digital networks.

relating to accessibility, equal opportunities, safety, training and participation in the sector.

Sixth, existing provisions on media ownership, licensing and investment do not adequately reflect technological convergence and the changing structure of the media industry. Restrictive licensing conditions and an unfavourable investment environment may limit innovation, growth and sustainability.

Finally, the absence of a sufficiently strong and independent media self-regulatory and oversight framework undermines professional accountability, effective dispute resolution and public confidence in the media sector.

4. Policy Gaps

4.1 Outdated Policy and Legal Framework

The 2003 Policy refers to laws and regulatory frameworks that have since been amended or repealed. It does not adequately reflect the current legal framework, including the Media Services Act, 2016 and the Access to Information Act, 2016.

The policy should therefore be comprehensively reviewed to ensure consistency with the Constitution, current legislation and relevant international and regional human rights instruments.

4.2 Digital Transformation

The policy does not adequately address digital journalism, online media, social media, internet-based broadcasting and technological convergence. The continued use of broad and undefined references to the “internet” is

4.3 Professionalism and Ethical Standards

The policy does not adequately address emerging challenges concerning journalistic professionalism, ethical conduct, quality of reporting, continuing professional development and working conditions.

4.4 Inclusion and Equality

The policy does not sufficiently address gender equality, the participation of women journalists, accessibility for journalists with disabilities, or the broader need for an inclusive media environment.

4.5 Institutional Coordination and Oversight

The policy does not establish a sufficiently clear framework for an independent media oversight and self-regulatory institution. A strong and independent Media Council is necessary to promote professional standards, accountability and effective dispute resolution.

insufficient for regulating a rapidly evolving digital information environment.

4.6 Constitutional and Human Rights Gaps

The policy contains an incomplete reference to Article 18 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania and does not sufficiently integrate international and regional standards on freedom of expression and access to information, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant African media freedom standards.

4.7 Protection and Safety of Journalists

The 2003 Policy is largely silent on the protection, safety and security of journalists while performing their professional duties. A modern policy should recognise journalists' right to operate in a safe and enabling environment without intimidation, harassment or unlawful interference.

4.8 Recognition of the Development Role of the Media

The policy insufficiently recognises the media and broadcasting sector as an important contributor to national development, including education, economic growth, culture, poverty reduction, social cohesion, public participation and democratic governance.

4.9 Separation of Media and Film Regulation

The regulation of film, visuals and video content should be clearly separated from the broader media and broadcasting policy framework and addressed under an appropriate dedicated Film Policy.

5. Recommendations

1. Align the policy with constitutional and international human rights standards, particularly freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information.
2. Recognise and protect the safety and security of journalists, including appropriate measures to prevent harassment, intimidation and other forms of interference with journalists performing their professional duties.
3. Strengthen freedom of expression and access to information by ensuring that regulatory measures are necessary, proportionate and consistent with constitutional and international human rights standards.

4. Recognise the development role of the media sector in promoting democracy, education, economic growth, culture, social cohesion, poverty reduction, public participation and national development.
5. Develop a comprehensive framework for digital transformation that recognises online journalism, digital broadcasting, social media, technological convergence and emerging forms of information dissemination.
6. Promote inclusion and equality by ensuring gender-responsive policies and accessibility measures for journalists with disabilities and other marginalised groups.
7. Reform media ownership and investment regulations to encourage responsible domestic and foreign investment, innovation and media pluralism while safeguarding editorial independence and the public interest.
8. Establish or strengthen an independent Media Council with a clear mandate, adequate institutional autonomy, accountability mechanisms and responsibility for professional standards and dispute resolution.
9. Fully implement the principle of reasonable access and accessibility to media content for persons with disabilities, including appropriate communication and
10. Ensure meaningful participation of media stakeholders and civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of the new policy.

5. Conclusion

The Media and Broadcasting Policy of 2003 no longer adequately responds to the legal, technological, social and economic realities of Tanzania's contemporary media environment. Its replacement is necessary to establish a coherent, rights-based and forward-looking framework capable of addressing both existing and emerging challenges.

LHRC therefore urges the Government to undertake an inclusive and participatory review process leading to the adoption of a new Media and Broadcasting Policy of Tanzania, 2025. The new policy should strengthen freedom of expression and access to information, protect journalists, promote professionalism and inclusivity, support innovation and investment, and ensure that the media sector effectively contributes to democratic governance and sustainable national development.

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