

The Role of the News Agency in Development (Support) Communication: A Case Study of Lesotho.

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Abstract

National News agencies in Africa were established as part of the Organisation of African Unity's strategy to decolonize information disseminated within and outside the continent and actively promote generation and dissemination of information geared towards the promotion of development related activities. As the main collectors and distributors of information at both national and international levels, national news agencies are strategically well placed to serve as the core of a country's news gathering and distribution system. Their efficacy, however, is dependent on the kind of environment in which they operate. Some of the notable factors which impinge upon news agencies effectiveness are the level of their capacity in terms of manpower, equipment and the reach of their news gathering networks and also the extent to which they adopt participatory approaches to communication.

After many decades of corruption, mismanagement and autocratic rule, the current wave of democratisation in Africa appears to offer the media a real chance to pressurize those in power to practice accountable and democratic governance. The Lesotho News Agency (LENA) was started as a joint project between the Lesotho Government and UNESCO in 1985. It is the only news organisation with offices in all the districts of the Country. The study critically discusses LENA's role in development communication and locates the agency within the wider dimensions of the country's overall development goals and strategies. The theoretical part deals with the introduction on national news agencies, the debates around the New World information and Communication Order (Chapter 1) and the definition of development (Chapter 2). Part II of the study focuses more on Lesotho and deals with underdevelopment and

development issues (Chapter 3); development communication in Lesotho (Chapter 4); LENA and Lesotho's media Landscape (Chapter 5); LENA, Women and Development (Chapter 8) and finally, a summary, conclusions and recommendations (Chapter 9).

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(These chapters are not included here.)

CHAPTER FIVE

5. THE LESOTHO NEWS AGENCY (LENA) AND LESOTHO'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

5.1 Introduction

The news agency uses channels through which it disseminates the information it collects. The channels' reach and the degree of their freedom to operate unrestricted, have a bearing on the news agency's effectiveness. The agency, therefore, cannot be viewed in isolation from these channels. This chapter therefore examines Lesotho's media landscape to determine, among other things (media) types, market structure and communication environment.

5.2 Background information

The history of the press in Lesotho dates back to 1833 when the first missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S) arrived in Lesotho. As part of their efforts to intensify dissemination of information pertaining to their missionary activities they established *Leselinyana la Basotho* in 1863 as an eight page newspaper. The newspaper was the first to appear in an African language. It was initially used to disseminate information on ecumenical affairs but later started including news on issues relating to the socio-economic and political **situation** in the country. Another newspaper called *Moeletsi oa Basoitho* was started by the Roman Catholic Missionaries in 1933. It was started as a bilingual paper publishing in both Sesotho and English. It now publishes only in the Sesotho language (MISER Consulting, 1995:2).

In the early sixties before independence the Government of Lesotho had a newspaper called the *Basutoland Times* which was renamed *Lesotho Times* after independence. It was published under the Prime Minister's office by the Department of Information. The *Lesotho Times* was replaced in 1968 by two publications called *Koena News* and *Molia* which were printed in English and Sesotho respectively. *Koena news* was a daily paper whilst *Molia* was printed three times a week using news items from Radio Lesotho news bulletins exclusively. In 1974 the department introduced a bilingual (English and Sesotho) weekly tabloid called *Mochochonono*. This was followed by another weekly (English) called *Lesotho Weekly* in 1975. *Mochochonono* and *Lesotho Weekly* were merged. The English section was called the *Comet* and the Sesotho version retained the name *Mochochonono*. Lesotho did not have a daily until in 1985 when a daily called *The Nation* was started by a private company. The newspaper however lasted for only three months due to financial problems. In 1986 *Mochochonono /Comet* was replaced by two weekly newspapers '*Lesotho Today*' and '*Lentsoe la Basotho*'. The two were published in English and Sesotho respectively (MISER Consulting, 1995:2-3).

Radio Lesotho was established by the government in 1964 and it is the only local radio station. In 1993/94 MISER Consulting conducted a nation-wide survey on listenership, readership and viewership. The total number of respondents for the survey who were captured for the analysis was 7397. 71 percent of respondents indicated that they listen to the radio. 58 percent listen daily, 10 percent listen weekly and 3 percent listen about once a month. The peak listening times for *Radio Lesotho* are in the mornings between 0500-0800 hours with 54 percent of listeners. It is followed by the evening peak between 1700-1900 hours with 49 percent and finally the lunch time peak between 1300-1400 hours with 43 percent. 65 percent of the survey Population have radios in their households which are in working order. 59 percent of those radios use batteries (MISER Consulting, 1995:23-25). According to Sechaba Consultants (1994:79) radio ownership is important as educational programmes broadcast over *Radio Lesotho* contribute significantly towards success at school. "There is some evidence to suggest that it may also contribute to better child health."

In terms of listenership percentage Maseru is top of the districts. Listenership percentages In respect of other districts were as follows: Mohale Hoek 16 percent, Leribe 13 percent. Mafeteng 12.7 percent, Quthing 12 percent. Berea 9 percent, Butha-Buthe 5 percent. Thaba Tseka 4 percent. Qacha's Nek 2.5 percent and finally Mokhotlong 2.4 percent. The overall

preference for radio stations received in Lesotho favoured *Radio Lesotho* with 66 percent followed by *Radio Sesotho* (now called *Sesotho Stereo*) of the *South African Broadcasting Corporation* with 31 percent. 3 percent listen to other radio stations including *BBC*, *Radio Mmabatho*, *Radio Metro* and *Radio Bop*. The quality of reception of *Radio Lesotho* generally varies according to ecological zones and districts for different times of the day and also depending on weather conditions. Respondents who regularly listen to *Radio Lesotho*, however, reception during the day was on the average generally good especially in the morning hours (MISER Consulting, 1995:29-36).

Until 1988, Lesotho did not have its own television. This was only made possible by a ten year agreement signed in 1988 between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the South African based M-NET, an independent entertainment commercial station. In an interview with this writer Thabiso Makintane, Programming Director of *Lesotho Television (LTV)*, explained that under the agreement *M-NET* was licensed to operate in Lesotho and in return undertook to provide LTV a 'window' to broadcast its programmes on the M-NET channel during the open time. The time allotted to LTV was to be 30 minutes initially with the provision to extend it by 30 minutes every 2-3 years, if LTV so requested, until it reached the maximum of 2 hours a day. Currently the station is broadcasting daily from 6.00pm to 7.00pm. Plans are underway to extend the time to 2 hours (5.00pm-7.00pm). The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting estimates that there are about 9,000 television sets in Lesotho.

Television is the least patronised communication medium in Lesotho. Only 16 percent of the total sample watch television compared to 71 percent who listen to radio and 32 percent who read newspapers/magazines. Despite the poor viewership patronage the few people who watch do so fairly regularly. Of the total viewership, for example, 9 percent watch daily, 5 percent weekly and only 3 percent are irregular viewers. 83 percent of respondents said they do not watch television for a variety of reasons ranging from unavailability of the equipment, lack of interest, lack of time to poor reception. 68 percent of non-viewers said they neither had television sets nor alternative means to watch. It was also observed that poor reception also discouraged potential viewers from owning television sets. This was particularly the case in the mountains and foothills where topography was reported to exert maximum adverse effect on television viewership (MISER Consulting, 1995:56-59).

The improvement of the broadcasting infrastructure for a more effective coverage of the country by both radio and television is already underway. In an interview with this writer, *Radio Lesotho*'s Chief Engineer, Lebohang Monnapula, said he expected reception to improve markedly early in 1998 in areas in the lowlands. "We have started re-locating the FM transmitter from Lancer's Gap station to the Berea Plateau from where the new FM transmission will be beamed throughout the country ." Monnapula explained that most areas in the six districts in the lowlands would receive a greatly improved signal after completion of the relocation project by December/January 1997/98.

5.3 Newspaper ownership patterns

As at 1993 the position of newspapers in Lesotho, excluding foreign publications, stood as follows:

Newspaper	Language	Frequency	Circul	Publisher	Establish
<i>Lentsoe la Basotho</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	10, 000	Department of Information	1974
Lesotho Today	English	Weekly	5, 000	Department of Information	1977
<i>Moeletsi oa Basotho</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	20, 000	Moeletsi oa Basotho	1933
<i>Leselinyana la Lesotho</i>	Sesotho	Fortnightly	15, 000	Lesotho Evangelical Church	1963
The Mirror	English	Weekly	4, 000	Mirror Newspapers	1988
<i>Makatolle</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	20, 000	Makatolle Newspapers	1963
<i>Mohlanka</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	6, 000	Mohlanka Newspapers	1992
<i>Mphatlalatsane</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	4, 000	Mphatlalatsane Publishers	1991
<i>Mphatlalatsane</i>	English	Weekly	4, 000	Mphatlalatsane Publishers	1991
<i>Moafrika</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	3, 500	Moafrika Publishers	1990
<i>Sechaba</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	7, 000	Sechaba Publishers	1992
<i>Leseli ka Sepolesa</i>	Sesotho	Fortnightly	1, 500	Police Headquarters	1992
<i>Moitseki</i>	Sesotho	Weekly	--	unknown	1993
<i>Mopheme</i>	English	Twice Weekly	2, 000	News Share	11994

Source: Department of Information, Maseru.

Sechaba, *Moitseki* and *Mphatlalatsane* (Sesotho and English weeklies) are no longer in circulation. In 1992 a popular bimonthly magazine, *Sethala*, and the quarterly Southern Star folded up. Another popular bilingual (Sesotho and English) magazine, *Shoeshoe*, which focuses on women and development issues had until 1995 been reduced to a four-page supplement in *Lesotho Today* and *Lentsoe la Basotho*. In 1995 it was restored to its magazine format but after about three issues it stopped after UNICEF stopped funding it. It was published by the Department of Information but had a board comprising mainly women from the private sector. There is also *Litsoakotleng*, a monthly magazine owned by the Christian Council of Lesotho as well as *The Web*, a Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organisation's publication. While the importance of these newspapers is largely recognised, their impact is perceived to be insignificant due to their limited circulation confined mainly in urban centres particularly the capital, Maseru. The inaccessibility of many locations in mountains and foothills of the country is a contributory factor (MISER, 1995:51-2).

5.4 Analysis of the press situation

The two top selling newspapers are the Roman Catholic weekly journal, *Moeletsi ou Basotho* (20,000 copies) and the ruling party's newspaper, *Makatolle* (20,000 copies). These are followed by the Lesotho Evangelical Church fortnightly, *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (15,000 copies) and the Government's weekly, *Lentsoe la Basotho* (10,000 copies). The rest of the newspapers, some of which are in English, have a limited circulation confined mainly to the capital, Maseru, and a few other peri-urban areas. The effectiveness of mass media systems in transmitting ideas and information and generating feedback about social issues among the national populations is partly a factor of the geographical reach of the systems. Media systems which do not extend significantly into communities where the majority of the population lives cannot adequately respond to the information needs of the society (Boafo, 1987: 29-31)

Inadequate resources are a constraint on the part of journalists in developing countries to reach as many people as they should or would want to. This problem is compounded by, notably, the absence of adequate economic and information infrastructures, especially in the rural and remote areas where in most countries the majority of the people live (Wilcox, 1982:212-213). The question to ask in the case of Lesotho is whether, given media ownership patterns, those whose newspapers circulate mainly in urban and peri-urban areas are likely to extend into rural areas" Commercial newspapers are motivated by profit and it is therefore questionable whether they would want to incur additional costs to target the impoverished rural areas.

Although the majority of newspapers in Lesotho are non-government owned, their poor circulation figures mean that they have a very limited reach in terms of readership. Their effectiveness in terms of addressing people's needs and aspirations is questionable, not only because of their limited circulation figures (for most of them), but also because they all use a vertical approach to communication in which they (and not the people) determine what to communicate (to the people). This is in accord with the philosophy and practice of the dominant paradigm with its emphasis on communication which is planned, developed, organized and implemented in a vertical way with the beneficiaries being treated as mere passive receivers of a finished reality (see Thomas. 1994:54). Although media in Lesotho are non-participatory this does not mean they necessarily, have no influence on, for example., the government of the day as they reach the key groups and opinion makers at the centre of 'modern' development. These are the people whose political wishes and views are decisive at the present time in developing countries (Chimutengwende, 1988:35).

Except for *Lentsoe la Basotho* which is government-owned, the rest of the newspapers in Lesotho are privately owned. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the country's constitution. Section 14 (1) of the Lesotho Constitution states that:

Every person shall be entitled to, and (except with his own consent) shall not be hindered in his enjoyment of, freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions Without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information Without interference (whether the communication be to the public generally or to any person or class of persons) and freedom from interference with his correspondence (I 993:28).

As freedom is not absolute section 14 (4) of the same constitution gives protection to those who may feel aggrieved by what is communicated from whatever source:

Any person who feels aggrieved by statements or ideas disseminated to the public in general by a medium of communication has the right to reply or to require a correction to be made using the same medium, under such conditions as the law establish (1993:28).

Despite Poor Circulation figures for most of the private press, its role as the watchdog cannot be discounted. Evidence suggests that governments do mind what newspapers say, irrespective of their circulation figures. In Lesotho, for example. When the then Prime Minister . Chief Leabua Jonathan, usurped power following the defeat of his political party in the 1970 national elections, he banned all newspapers he perceived not to support him irrespective of their circulation figures (Khaketla, 1970). In spite of the challenges of the speed and audiovisual punch of the electronic media, the newspaper is still perceived as being relevant in both developed and developing countries (Nwosu, 1994: 103). This perception is partly due to the fact that even though the newspaper is slow, it has a lasting power far beyond that of the spoken word or the visual image, and readers can refer to it again and again.

5.5 LENA's clientele

As of June 1997 the only private newspaper which was a client of LENA was *The Mirror*. In an interview with this writer, the Editor of *The Mirror* newspaper, Makotoko Molomo, said he was quite satisfied with LENA's news service. "We use their feature stories a lot as well as hard news items and this has proved to be very cost effective on our part. Makotoko Molomo said LENA's subscription of R250-00 a month was a real bargain and had made it possible for his paper to operate with a small number of reporters. He said the service had proved extremely useful regarding stories emanating from the districts as his paper could not afford (financially) to station reporters in the districts.

The government media (radio, press and television) are the main users of LENA's news service (more on this in Chapter Six).The that the Majority of the newspapers in Lesotho are urban based with limited circulation and are not clients of LENA suggests that they seldom if ever carry rural news as they have no reporters outside the capital. Rural news has been defined as news that inform and educates urbanites and governments about the general life of the rural dwellers and inform and educates rural dwellers about government policies, activities and programmes and other factors they might need to improve their living standards (Nwosu, 1988:38). This situation also deprives them of the opportunity to engage in critical reporting of issues, processes and events that affect the majority of their people on a day to day basis and thereby acting as catalysts in development communication. While the newspaper may not be

that powerful in changing deep-seated attitudes and behaviours among individuals in developing nations, it is quite effective in helping to raise awareness and provide the information and education which must

be acquired by individuals before development can occur at any level (Nwosu, 1988:118).

Most of the newspapers are between six and eight pages in size and this suggests that they carry a limited volume of news even about the capital itself where most of them are based. Newspaper/magazine readership is not as popular as radio listenership. 32 percent of the sample population read compared to 71 percent who listen to the radio. Daily readers constitute 7 percent compared to 58 percent in radio listenership. Weekly, monthly and fortnightly readers represent only 12 percent and 6 percent respectively. 24 percent were not interested in reading while 16 percent said they were not able to read due to blindness or gross illiteracy. 13 percent were not able to read due to the unavailability of newspapers in their locality while 9 percent said they could not afford the cost of newspapers. 6 percent did not specify why they did not read newspapers (MISER Consulting, 1995:50).

Newspaper/Magazine readership is 32 percent of the sample population. *Moeletsi oa Basotho and Leselinyana la Lesotho* (both church newspapers) are read by 51 percent of readers. They are followed by political party papers (*Mohlanka, Makatolle*) with the score of 20 percent. *Lentsoe la Basotho* 10 percent, foreign papers such as *Sowetan, Star, and Sunday Times* with 8 percent, Magazines such as *Bona, Drum and Lilsoakolleng* also with 8 percent and lastly private/commercial papers such as *The Mirror and Mo-Afrika* with 1 percent. The three most preferred areas of interest in newspapers/magazines for readers were found to be current affairs, local news and sports. Of the total readership these three items attracted scores of 24, 23 and 14 percent respectively (MISER Consulting, 1995:52-53).

The district readership for *Lentsoe la Basotho* is on the average at 2 percent while that of *Lesotho Today* is at 0.4 percent (both government newspapers). Two of the three mountain districts, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek recorded 0 percent readership among total number of readers in the districts. Foreign newspapers and magazines were also found to be read by only about 3 percent of respondents. They are mainly popular in the major urban and peri-urban centres with an average of 40 percent of readers being in Maseru.

In an interview with this writer, the Assistant Editor of *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, Francis Khoaripe, said the editorial staff of his newspaper was interested in the LENA news service. "We actually had a trial service around 1988/89, at the end of which we recommended to the Board of Directors that we subscribe to the LENA service." The Assistant Editor said to their surprise the response was negative. "An influential member of the board argued that, the Lesotho Government of which LENA is part, like any other government, had a responsibility to provide information to the public free of charge". Khoaripe said as the newspaper with the highest circulation in the country, he believed that if his newspaper included LENA reports from the districts its contents would be more representative of the country. "in my view, all national newspapers should make use of the LENA service as none of us has reporters in the districts. We can only receive news from the districts through LENA."

The Editor of *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, Thoahlane Thoahlane cited financial constraints as being behind "our failure to subscribe to the LENA news service". In an interview with this writer, the Editor said their four-page newspaper was fortnightly as part of money saving measures. "Our four-paper newspaper cannot accommodate LENA's copy. There is simply no space." He said the management of the newspaper was not so keen to change the status quo because the newspaper is fundamentally meant to carry church news. The survey results also showed that the two church newspapers which have a widespread and fair distribution countrywide are read by more than 50 percent of the total number of Basotho who read regularly. It may be fair to suggest that as long established church newspapers, the two have built up traditional patronage based in part on church affiliation.

5.6 Government media ownership

Fundamental shifts are occurring in terms of the Government's perception of its role in information dissemination and indications are that it is set on divesting itself of some of its important media /agencies (see Ministry of Planning, 1997:246). In an interview with this writer, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Monyane Moleleki, said Government believed that the public and the private sector should play a greater and more meaningful role in information gathering and dissemination. "As a government, ours is to create an enabling environments" Moleleki said Government had already taken the decision to incorporate Radio Lesotho before the next general elections scheduled for 1998. Towards this end a draft bill for the incorporation of Radio Lesotho was to be submitted in parliament before the dissolution of

parliament. Moleleki was confident that by April 1998 Radio Lesotho would be a corporation run on professional lines and responsible to an independent board of directors.

The question is who will be the main beneficiaries of the Government's shifts in media policy and to what extent will the communication environment be enhanced? Are these changes likely to bring previously marginalized sections of the community into mainstream communication process? In this changing political environment what media types are needed to underpin democratic communication? For the media in Lesotho to be truly democratic and viable the system should allow for a range of media offerings to cater to the interests of the different sections of the community. Such offerings need to be diverse in purpose, funding, ownership and scope (extent of coverage). The core elements of both the print and electronic media and their defined role have been identified as:

- private/commercial media (mostly urban based and western oriented and profit maximising);
- government publications (serving as mouthpieces for the dissemination of government information);
- civil society Media (for example, trade union or Non-governmental Organisations Publications);
- developmental media (development oriented and usually aimed at the marginalised and rural sectors);
- party political media (to advance the causes of specific political groupings); and
- Community media (largely restricted to a small geographical locality).
- public service broadcaster (publicly owned corporation catering for all tastes and interests);
- Commercial/private broadcaster (profit motivated); and
- community broadcaster (initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest or geographical community (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997: 10-13).

5.7 Communication environment

Radio is the most widespread mass medium in the rural areas and therefore the most frequently used for development communication by different government ministries and private institutions. Its advantages include the fact that it overlaps literacy, and can be used in areas with no electricity. Responses in terms of feedback to its programmes is through letters and of late the introduction of several phone-in programmes has facilitated instant feedback. While feedback through letters (often delayed) cannot be interpreted as a reflection of the total audience even phone calls, despite their instant feedback, cannot be a reflection of the total audience as it is a minority that has telephone facilities. The centralized media system is also a major contributory factor in minimizing popular participation in media programmes particularly by people in the rural areas (see Mda, 1993:59-61). The centralized media systems breed an atmosphere of estrangement between media professionals and the majority of their audiences. The result is that the professionals and the power elite behind them are either unable to appreciate the problems that are local to the audiences or are able to pretend that such problems do not exist or are of no real consequence (Moemeka, 1988:24-25).

Central to the effective and efficacious use of communication media seems to be the establishment of adequate communication infrastructures to ensure, a constant two-way flow of information between, in particular, the rulers and the ruled. Also important is the need for media to have press freedom if they are to act as facilitators of democracy (Kasoma, 1992:123). Underscoring the need for democracy to facilitate free, open and balanced communications, the MacBride Report (1980:2531), states that the inherent nature of communication means that its fullest possible exercise and potential depend on the surrounding political, social and economic conditions, the most vital of these being democracy within countries and equal, democratic relations between them. "It is in this context that the democratization of communication at national and international levels, as well as the larger role of communication in democratizing society, acquires utmost importance."

It is private media's freedom to operate unduly restricted that is seen as playing a vital role in the development process of Third World countries. The media can only be free from censorship and be a means of free expression if the general legal and political climate is favourable. Statutory provisions such as secrecy laws, sedition and subversion that restrict media freedom should be repealed and journalists' right to protect their sources of information should be guaranteed by law. The public right of access to information should be enshrined in Freedom of Information Legislation (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:3). While economic development is not contingent on

the existence of a free press, the role of a free press in articulating the concerns of, in particular, the disadvantaged and facilitating accountable governance cannot be overemphasized.

5.8 Proliferation of newspapers

In Lesotho no less than six newspapers were started in the first two years of multiparty rule. Most of them, however, have folded up due to financial constraints. This pattern suggests that, ultimately, only those who have financial resources will remain in the market and only their will be heard. It is in the main this situation which is said to have formed the basis of the views of the social responsibility theory. The central point of this theory is that media should act in a socially responsible way by ensuring that the views of both majority and minority groups are represented in the media and that members of the public are provided with sufficient information to enable them to form independent opinions. The theory seeks to reconcile the principles of individual freedom and choice, freedom of the media and media responsibility in two ways:

- the development of public institutions, independent of government, for the control of the broadcasting industry;
- the continuing development of professionalism to advance and nurture balanced and impartial news presentation (Roelefse, 1996:54).

The principles of independence, diversity and access are regarded as essential pillars of a democratic communication environment. Thinking on this principle of access (and exposure) is centrally (but not exclusively) concerned with finding mechanisms for empowering disadvantaged communities by enabling them to talk for and about themselves. Towards this end, the favoured mechanisms include community newsletters, community radio, grassroots media training projects and Media Resource Centres (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:7-9). What Lesotho's Media Policy is advocating seems to be very much close to what has been named democratic-participant theory in favouring community based communication media. Essentially the theory maintains that the recipient has a right to relevant information, a right to react and a right to means of communication within his/her community. It rejects the necessity of uniform centralized high cost, highly professionalised state controlled media (McQuail, 1983:96-97, Roelofse, 1996:59).

Proliferation of newspapers and other media therefore need to be analysed in terms of their contribution towards enhancing the communication environment. There may be many different newspapers but all generally advocating the same viewpoints or peripheral issues which have no impact on the lives of the majority of the people. Moreover, a lot still needs to be done in terms of, inter alia, infrastructures to facilitate more access to news media in general, especially in respect of the people in the rural areas. With the exception of Makatolle (Basutoland Congress Party newspaper) all the newspapers that emerged after the restoration of democratic rule have poor circulation figures ranging between 1,500 and 4,000 copies a week and are distributed mainly in the capital (see MISER, 1995). Even if their circulation figures were good the fact that they, like the rest of the media in Lesotho, use a top-down non-participatory communication approach makes their impact on the lives of the majority of the people questionable.

5.9 Human rights

Freedom of speech, of the press, of information and of assembly are vital for the realization of human rights. Defence of human rights is one of the media's most vital tasks (MacBride Report, 1980:265). One of the main casualties of post-independence era in Africa has been human rights as a result of undemocratic laws enacted ostensibly to protect fragile national institutions and promote development. An important contribution which media can make to the democratic process is denunciation of abuses of power in society and defence of human rights (Ansah, 1992:27, Hamelink, 1993). Violation of human rights in Lesotho has been a constant feature of the political system with or without the sanctioning of the political leadership (see for example, Khaketla, 1970: UNDP Report, 1994). Even after restoration of constitutional rule in 1993, serious human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, allegations of ill-treatment and torture and deaths in custody as well as deaths resulting from the use of unjustified lethal force by the security forces took place in 1994 apparently without government sanction. The perpetrators have not been brought to justice (Amnesty International UK, 1995).

Journalists can intervene to promote human rights by:

- by educating the public about their rights so that they are able to see when Government or any other party violates them;

- facilitate public discussion on the issues of democracy and human rights;
and
- by providing information to the information-poor (Muna, 1992).

There is an 'unbridgeable' gulf between those who view the media as servants of the state and those who for all the tensions between government and media in the 'freest' democracies, believe that a well informed citizenry is the best defence against the abuse of power, and the power of the state in particular and that a free press is therefore indispensable (Righter, 1995:1 13). Educating the public about human rights is, however, a mammoth task which cannot be left to journalists alone. A comprehensive approach is needed which would ensure that community fora, schools curricula, institutions such as the church, among others, are used to conscientize people about their human rights as part of human development process (Kieffer. 1984:16).

Highlighting of human rights violations by journalists is even more imperative given that they themselves are victims of human rights violations. Evidence suggests that even in the wake of the new trends towards democratic governance political leaders are still determined to act against

journalists who challenge the status quo. Most African governments see unquestioning reverence

to leaders as the hallmark of responsible Journalism (Mwaura, 1994:91-93)). Several democratically elected governments are becoming increasingly reliant on the oppressive tools inherited from their dictatorial predecessors to stifle freedom of expression and media freedom (MISA. 1996:1). In Lesotho, for example, there are signs that the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle is becoming intolerant of the criticisms levelled against it by the private press. A mob believed to belong to the ruling party's right wing invaded the office of the *Mo-Afrika* newspaper in Maseru and subjected its staff to abuse and threats after accusing them of being grossly biased against the Prime Minister. 'The police were reported not to have taken any action against the offenders. 'The government has on several occasions accused some of the private newspapers of writing lies about it. In return the newspapers concerned have accused the (government of being allergic to criticism (*Moeletsi ou Basotho*, 27-10-96).

Lesotho does not have press laws or ethical codes to protect journalists. Media laws in these countries, are too negative and tend to concentrate on what the press cannot do to the point of ignoring what it can do. Just like any other law, a good media law ought to attempt to strike a balance between the rights of the individual and those of the public. Some of the laws which obtain in Lesotho and other former British colonies, tend to overprotect a few individuals at the expense of the general welfare of society. A revision of these laws could enable the press to, among other things, investigate and publicise corrupt practices wherever they occur including those in government circles (Kasoma, 1992:122- 123).

5.10 Conclusion

The current media system is highly centralized and elitist in orientation, covering, mainly, events taking place in urban and/or peri-urban areas. Given that more than 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas it can be concluded that the system's capability to be gainfully employed in development strategies and initiatives is questionable both in terms of its limited geographical reach as well as its predominantly top-down approach to communication. The newly formulated media policy recognises this and calls on the government to take a leading role in levelling the playing field to bring other sections of the community into mainstream communication process. Only time will tell if government has the commitment and political will to do just that.

The next chapter focuses on the Lesotho News Agency (LENA) in development communication.

CHAPTER SIX

6. THE LESOTHO NEWS AGENCY (LENA) IN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

6.1 Introduction

The central argument of this chapter is that national news agencies have not been effective in development communication because they have not been provided the appropriate socioeconomic space they need to operate effectively. As the main inhibitions to development have been identified as structural rather than informational, structures and relationships that impede development have to be dismantled as a necessary condition of providing that space

(Jayaweera, 1987:92; Boafo, 1985:85). Experience has shown that development communication when used without concomitant changes in the structure of society, could lead to the strengthening of the status quo (Goonasekera, 1987:65). There are also other crucial elements that constitute the space needed for effective development communication (more on this later).

With the preceding background in mind, this chapter sets out to discuss the role of the news agency in development communication particularly in the light of the emerging trends towards democratic Governance. The Lesotho News Agency (LENA) is used here as a case study. The interviews in this chapter were conducted by this writer in Lesotho during June 1996.

6.1.1 The framework

The central question to answer in relation to the information provided by national news agencies in particular and mass media in general who really benefit from it? Is it the people or those who own and/or control them? This chapter is divided into two phases; the project phase and beyond the project phase. This is necessary because during the project phase LENA was in effect a UNESCO project. One of the main factors which needs to be taken into consideration when accepting foreign aid is ensuring that dependency relationships are not created in the process so that the project may be sustained beyond the end of assistance from the donor agency. Donor assistance is not eternal nor unlimited and failure to plan accordingly for this reality has resulted in many development projects in developing countries folding up (Transformation Resource Centre, 1988).

6.2 The Project phase

6.2.1 'The establishment of LENA

As part of media development effort, the Lesotho government decided in 1983 to establish the Lesotho News Agency (LENA). The agency was charged with the responsibility of collecting news from all parts of the country for distribution to media organizations and subscribers locally and abroad. The news organization's head-office was in Maseru (the capital) and two offices were opened in Leribe and Mochale's Hoek to serve the northern districts and southern districts respectively. Due to lack of adequate preparation the agency experienced serious problems of staff incompetence. Consequently a request was made to UNESCO for assistance for the development of the news agency. Within the framework of the Arab Gulf Fund (AGFUND) of

UNESCO, a limited assistance was provided in the form of editorial equipment, four motorcycles and a Suzuki 4-wheel driven vehicle. A consultant was also provided to conduct a short term training programme and to prepare a plan for the further development of the news agency (UNESCO Report, 1992:3-4).

Due to funding limitations on the part of both UNESCO and the Lesotho Government, progress made on the development of the news agency during the first attempt was not impressive and by the end of 1984 the two district offices had been closed and the operations of the agency were limited to what could be achieved by the head-office. In 1985 the effort was revived and four district offices were opened in Leribe, Mafeteng, Teyateyaneng and Thaba-Tseka. At the same time a journalist from Zambia was recruited by the Government to serve as a journalism training officer and an advisor to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. This was followed by a formal project request to UNESCO for further assistance for the development of the news agency. The project was subsequently approved and the Federal Republic of Germany agreed in March 1986 to fund the project to the tune of USD560,000 (see appendix 11 for Lesotho/UNESCO agreement p.267). It was at the same time decided that the Lesotho News Agency Development Project (LENAD) would be administered with the project for the development of news agencies in Southern and Eastern Africa. The South East African News Agency Development Project (SEANAD) was to become operational in June 1986 ([UNESCO Report, 1992:5).

The SEANAD Project came into being in 1986 following repeated requests made to UNESCO for assistance in the development of communication facilities and services in the countries concerned, especially in the rural areas where transport and communication services have in many cases either been non-existent or, at best, inadequate. The collection and distribution of news was particularly difficult because even where modest technical facilities existed, there was no trained manpower for the collection, processing and distribution of news (SEANAD Report 1993: 1 8).

A total of 13 countries have participated in SEANAD at one stage or another during its seven-year history, and on all three phases of the project, emphasis has been on training. The content and level of the courses have been designed on the basis of the priority needs of the participating news agencies. The majority have dealt with various aspects of basic and advanced journalism.

Specialized areas of reporting have included, notably, rural reporting as well as photojournalism, the environment, business, economics and sports etc. In addition, training has been provided for the more effective organization and administration of news agency operations. Apart from management training, such courses have included news agency librarianship and documentation as well as computer operations (SEANAD Report, 1993: 18-19).

Equipment provided by the project for individual news agencies have included photographic equipment, typewriters, photocopiers, facsimile equipment, computer systems, tape recorders, teleprinters, telephone equipment and motor vehicles (including motorcycles). The training programmes conducted so far and the limited amount of equipment provided have, according to the recipient agencies, made significant contributions towards the strengthening of their operations. For the majority of the news agencies the training and equipment needs are so enormous that getting them to the point in their overall development effort requires generally higher level of inputs sustained over long periods. Government commitment to the project was good in all countries, while an evaluation of the project had found it to be a well-balanced, cost-effective approach towards the eventual realization in each country of a professional, development-oriented news agency (SEANAD Report. 1993: 19).

6.2.2 Objectives of the project

The central objective of the project was to form a corps of journalists who could manage and operate a news agency geared more effectively to the social, economic, educational needs and development goals of the country, especially in rural areas. Towards this end a work plan was formulated to cover the following areas of activity which were regarded as crucial to the project's success. These were:

- staff recruitment and training;
- acquisition of a building to be used as headquarters of the news agency,

- design and adoption of appropriate operational and administrative structures for the news agency;
- preparation and implementation of a master plan for the development of technical facilities for the news agency; and
- launching of full scale operations by the Lesotho News Agency (UNESCO Report, 1 992:6-7).

The question is how did the project perform in relation to its stated principal areas of activity?

6.2.3 Staff recruitment and training

Over the four years that the project was in implementation, a total of 34 Journalists were trained In four major courses and four short term courses organised locally. Two of the major courses were for nine months each while the other two were for six months. Each of the courses was followed by a period of on-the- job training during which trainees worked in the newsroom and field assignments under the direct supervision of their instructors. The short-term courses were in photo-Journalism, news agency library operations and in general newsroom operations. To strengthen the rural orientation required in the work of the news agency, special training workshops based in rural areas were organized on three of the major courses. Attachments to the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (ZIANA) were organised for some of the journalists. Training was also provided for the management through attachments and study tours to news agencies in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A library for the news agency was set up in 1990 (UNESCO, 1992:7-10).

Although officially the minimum entry requirement to join the news agency as a trainee was a Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) with a pass in English, this was not adhered to from the start. LENA records show that out of a total of 24 trainees for 1986 and 1987, less than four met the Minimum required qualification. This coupled with the fact that the agency

operated strictly in English, a second language to most Basotho people, meant that recruitment of trainees had not been done in accordance with the job specification. The UNESCO Report (1992) states that when it became obvious that most reporters were having serious problems expressing themselves in English, an English instructor was temporarily hired to give upgrading English lessons. The question to ask at this juncture is whether there is a need for a news agency in a developing country which does not use English as a first language to use English as its operational language and accordingly make English proficiency a requirement for journalists?

6.2.4 Technical facilities and operational structures

Two news agency specialists were recruited as consultants from the Federal Republic of Germany. One of the consultant, a Journalist from the German News Agency (DPA), worked with project staff and UNESCO's Chief Technical Advisor in the region on planning editorial staff strength, training activities, drafting of an administrative structure for the agency and preparation of a list of editorial equipment required. The other consultant, a telecommunications engineer, prepared a master plan for the development of the technical facilities of the news agency and provided guidelines for the selection and procurement of equipment. The most significant technical facility developed by the project was the modern computer-based news handling facility. Other technical facilities provided included photographic equipment, heavy duty photocopiers, motorcycles and three four-wheel motor vehicles. The Lesotho Government had already bought two vehicles for the news agency (UNESCO, 1992: 12- I 5).

6.2.5 LENA in operation

By 1987 LENA had opened offices in all the ten districts of the country. On average about twenty news stories a day were produced by the agency. In the same year the agency secured a 45 minute slot on Radio Lesotho (national radio station) for its news and current affairs programme which was intended to give more publicity to news and events taking place in rural areas. This programme was broadcast four times a week at peak time in the evenings. To expand its distribution service, LENA launched a fortnightly news and feature service in November 1989. Copies of the bulletin were distributed free of charge to clients and management in both the public and the private sector. With funding from UNICEF, the agency launched a quarterly supplement (written in Sesotho) dedicated to issues pertaining to the

welfare of women and children. Copies of the supplement were carried in the two government newspapers, *Lentsoe la Basotho* and *Lesotho Today* as well as the Roman Catholic newspaper, *Moeletsi oa Basotho*. Copies of the supplement were also supplied free of charge to some of the health centres for easy access by women attending health clinics. By June 1990 all of the items spelled out in the work plan had been completed. The staff list stood at 18 and all the nine district offices were manned. To facilitate constant review and further strengthening of the agency's operations, LENA joined the SEANAD Project in January 1991 (UNESCO, 1992:1619).

6.3 Beyond the project's phase

While acknowledging the need to strengthen the agency's operations, UNESCO's terminal report (1992) of the LENAD Project paints a relatively positive picture of the agency's performance during its project's phase.

6.3.1 Ownership and control

Like most Third World news agencies, LENA is part of the civil service establishment. In its terminal report on the Lesotho News Agency Project, UNESCO (1992:22) recommended that the Lesotho Government take steps to establish LENA as a public body outside the framework of the civil service with full administrative autonomy. The report argued that such a move would enable the agency maintain the desired standard of professionalism. Professionalism has been defined as:

- the acquisition of a recognised body of knowledge;
- adoption of certain traditions and usages;
- maintenance of a set of well defined standards;
- application of certain sanctions in the event of non-compliance with the established rules of conduct, and
- commitment, autonomy and opportunity to practice without undue interference from external sources (Ansah. 1980, quoted In Boafo, 1988:59).

It needs to be remembered that government communication exists within the sphere of public administration which has its rules and regulations which may be incompatible with some aspects of professionalism. Failure to take into account the role and functions of the public service as a

whole may cause difficulties (Theunissen, 1997: 10). In Lesotho, for example, under general rules of conduct of public officers, section 14 (1) reads:

a public officer shall not engage in conduct that adversely affects the performance of his duties or brings the public service into discredit, disrepute or contempt, or brings the authorities of Government or any Minister of Government into discredit, disrepute or contempt (Public service Act 1995: 149).

The question is what problems does the Lesotho civil service of which LENA is part have and how do they impact on the performance of the agency? Since the late 1970s a number of reports which assessed the performance of the Lesotho public service concluded that it was beset with a nexus of intractable problems which led to poor performance. Some of the problems identified included weaknesses in the system of recruitment, training and development; inadequate and cumbersome administrative systems; outdated rules and regulations; distorted organisational structures and inadequate skills which lead to increased dependence on expatriates. Additional concerns were also noted in subsequent independent reports. These included slow and complicated decision-making processes, inadequate management capability, high staff turnover and transfers, low morale and weak communication and co-ordination systems (Mhlanga, 1992).

After the suspension of the constitution during the political crisis of 1970, the Public Service Commission (PSC) which normally advises the Minister of the Public Service on recruitment, retention and motivation of civil servants lost its executive authority to the Prime Minister. This was followed by increased political influence on appointments and promotions with the result that there was a significant shift of power from bureaucrats and technocrats to ministers in the day to day running of the public service. Dismissals and demotions have characterized changes in government since 1970. In general, these political moves have deeply politicized the civil service, divided loyalties and created endemic job insecurity. They are also partially responsible for low morale, disregard for regulations and set policies and growing nepotism (UNDP Report, 1994:74). The unified grading salary structure introduced in the public service in the 1980s favours administrative as against professional and technical categories of workers. In the absence of incentives for professional deepening, a lot of professional and technical employees are not keen to attain high levels of proficiency (Mhlanga. 1992:8).

The fact that, generally speaking media institutions in Africa are part of the state bureaucracy and are also run as bureaucracies rather than as professional institutions with a mandate to disseminate information poses serious problems. Lack of professionalism is still preventing the media in Africa from reaffirming their role and power in society. Poor training facilities, low salaries and excessive political control have all impeded the press to develop as an independent but vital instrument in the society. Many journalists find themselves in a social environment in which they have turned into lackeys of the state powers rather than promoters of a democratic exchange of views among different sectors of society. The fact that African media have played only a negligible role in moulding public opinion and public decision-making is directly connected to the way African states are being run (Ruijter, 1989:62-63).

Civil servants journalists, in particular, are faced with the problem of not being recognised by most of their governments as professionals. This is shown by their treatment and the attitudes of the authorities towards them. They are almost always treated as objects of suspicion and possible persecution unlike people in other professions. They also lack job security because of the sensitive nature of their role in society. Their rights to, and obligations in society and the relationship between the media and the state are not clearly defined. Often, their job and personal security are at the whims of arbitrary state officials. Low wages in the media in comparison with other professions is another important constraining factor. Added to this promotions are slow and based on civil service procedures which are unsuitable to communicators because of the very nature of their work (Chimutengwende, 1988:42).

The Director of LENA. Nkoe Thakali, was also critical of the civil service environment which he described as non-conducive to professionals Such as journalists. In an interview with this writer, Thakali bemoaned the fact that in the civil service establishment all civil servants were subjected to the same rules and regulations with no distinction whatsoever made between professionals and non-professionals. In his view as long as LENA remained part of the civil service establishment, attainment of professionalism would be difficult and the perception that the agency was a government propaganda arm would linger on.

Thakali was also concerned about the vulnerability of the agency from arbitrary decisions from the top. He cited as an example changes which were imposed on the agency by the Principal Secretary (PS) who joined the Ministry in October 1993. These included instructions that the

agency stop producing publications such as its quarterly supplement of features dedicated to the welfare of women and children 'as this was the function of the Department of Information'. The agency was also instructed to discontinue its news and current affairs programme on Radio Lesotho 'as radio programmes belong to radio people'. According to the UNESCO's Report (1992) LENA's news and current affairs programme which was dominated by news reports from villages was one of the most popular programmes on the national radio station.

The instruction to discontinue LENA's news and current affairs programme was a blow not only to rural people but also to the Radio listeners in general in that it drastically reduced the diversity of news particularly in terms of rural Sources as the programme mainly focused on rural development projects (more on this in the next chapter). Radio Lesotho has been criticized by many listeners for having too many repeat items on its news bulletin (MISER, 1995:45) for instance, more often than not its early morning bulletins are identical with those of the previous evening. Given the number of stories it receives from LENA and the fact that it also has its own reporters, it would seem that the problem may be caused by poor newsroom administration and not necessarily by a shortage of news items.

6.3.2 Output

On the positive side, however, Thakali felt that LENA's main achievement was the fact that since it started operating, many areas outside the capital were having the kind of coverage they never had before LENA was established. "Prior to the establishment of LENA it was a rarity for people in places away from the capital to feature in the news.' Thakali said although there was still a lot to be done to bring the majority of the people into mainstream communication process, LENA took pride in the fact that there was now more information collected and distributed about the country both locally and internationally. In an interview with this writer, former Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Morapeli Motaung, echoed this view but was quick to add that as Radio Lesotho was the main consumer and distributor of LENA's news material it was imperative for the Ministry to ensure that Radio Lesotho appreciated the importance of using as much copy of LENA as possible. He pointed out that "it was a waste of taxpayers' money to be paying reporters to collect and write stories which were not being used for no apparent good reason". Motaung attributed the problem to poor organisation and management in the radio newsroom.

On the output of the agency, Thakali said it had declined from between 20 and 25 stories a day while LENA was still a project under UNESCO to between 10 and 15 stories a day. He attributed the decline in stories produced by the agency partly to the vacancy factor which was compounded by the IMF induced lengthy and cumbersome process which had to be followed when filling vacant positions. Officially each reporter is expected to produce at least two stories a day. The disadvantage, however, with this system is that the pressure to produce more than one story a day may result in the production of stories with no contextualisation, in-depth analysis or adequate backgrounders. While this may favour radio style of journalism it does a disservice to newspapers and other clients who prefer more detailed stories.

6.3.3 In the newsroom

This researcher spent some time in LENA's newsroom observing operations. This is how a typical weekday is: Most reporters are in by 8.00 in the morning. All submit diaries to the editor indicating the stories they intend covering on the day and each reporter is expected to write a minimum of two stories per day. One of the senior reporters assigned to edit district copy (stories from the districts) receives diaries by telex or phone from reporters in the districts. By about 8.15am all diaries are expected to be in. They are then typed into computer and copies of print-outs called "diary copies" are hand delivered to the newsrooms of Radio Lesotho, Lesotho Television and Information Department. Other recipients are the offices of the Principal Secretary, Deputy Principal Secretary, Director of Broadcasting and Director of Information. These copies contain information on stories to be covered by the agency for the day as well as stories it received and used the previous day.

At 9.00am the editor and the senior reporter in charge of the district copy attend an editorial meeting in the Director's office. The meeting reviews the previous day's work and discusses the day's work as well as other pertinent issues such as discipline, staff training and promotions. The meeting is usually kept within 30 minutes or so. Each reporter has a diskette to use to put his/her story into the computer (centrally connected to the main server). Whoever has finished his/her story physically goes to the editor's office to tell him/her the title of his/her document (story). The editor then edits the story after which he/she sends it to clients. The computer system in use can send up to six clients simultaneously and goes through the Lesotho Telecommunication Corporation (LTC). It is a rather slow system for a news agency expected to be first with the news.

News reports from the districts are received via telex or by phone when telex facilities have problems. All the district offices have phone facilities and with the exception of one district (Mokhotlong, unreliable power supply) all of them have telex facilities as well. A working day ends at 4.30pm except for reporters assigned to cover events taking place after 4.30pm such as receptions, for example. On weekends two reporters are assigned to cover weekend activities. This is done on a rotational basis and all reporters are involved.

Thakali admitted that the majority of news stories feature activities in which government officials are involved. "As a government owned news agency, priority of news coverage is bound to favour government officials". While this may be true it is important that such coverage is conducted in a manner that analyzes or assesses government's performance in relation to its mandate from the electorate as part of media's responsibility to promote accountable democratic governance. A national news agency is an important source of national news. National news in many countries is principally news which refers to events of nation-wide significance or relevance. Thus the activities of a central government are as a general rule matters of national significance (Boyd-Barrett, 1980:205).

The table below is on stories produced by LENA during September 1997. The month has been randomly selected:

<u>Week 1</u>	Date	Diaries Maseru & District	Used copy	Used copy
	1	-	9	11
	2	30	11	8
	3	26	12	8
	4	41	14	14
	5	35	13	10
	6	weekend	2	-
	7	weekend	4	-

	Total	132	65	51
<u>Week 2</u>	8	20	8	9
	9	20	10	10
	10	23	10	9
	11	29	10	12
	12	-incomplete record	-	-
	13	weekend	-	-
	14	weekend	4	-
	Total	92	42	40
<u>Week 3</u>	15	29	6	8
	16	31	10	8
	17	28	12	9
	18	24	8	10
	19	24	9	6
	20	-	9	-
	21	-	4	-
	Total	136	58	41
<u>Week 4</u>	22	33	14	7
	23	35	15	4
	24	39	-	-
	25	-	16	6
	26	29	21	4
	27	-	4	-
	28	-	4	-
	Total	136	74	21

Data analysis - Combined Totals (of stories)

	Maseru	Districts	Combined total
Week 1	65	51	116
Week 2	42	40	82

Week 3	58	41	99
Week 4	74	21	95
Total	239	153	392

Please note that Maseru is the name of the capital as well as the tenth district of Lesotho. Of the nine other districts only two were not represented in this analysis. They are Mokhotlong and Botha-Botha. The writer was informed by the LENA management that the offices in the two districts were temporarily unmanned.

LENA's average production per week: $392/4 = 98$ stories.

LENA's average production per day excluding the dates whose records were not available (i.e. 12, 13 and 24):
 $392/25 (28 - 3) = 15.68$ stories

LENA's average production per week in Maseru: $239/4 = 59.75$

LENA's average production per day in Maseru: $239/25 = 9.56$

LENA's average production per week in the Districts $153/4 = 38.5$

LENA's average production per day in the districts (weekends excluded as well as 24/9/): $153/19(20-1) = 8$

Staffing (in September):

Maseru (Hdqts)

Districts

14

7 (1 per district)

Level of Staffing

Maseru

Districts

Senior reporters 7

1

Reporters 7

6

It is pertinent to point out that in Maseru only 9 staff members collected and wrote news. Assignment arrangements were such that two reporters worked full-time in the preparation of material for LENA's 30 minutes twice weekly slot on Radio Lesotho. This is meant to give more publicity to LENA's stories especially those from the districts. LENA's news and current affairs programme 'Ho tloha Tele' features live reports by LENA reporters with focus mainly on district news reports. The programme has been reintroduced effective from August 1997. One

reporter was full-time on Reuters copy while one of the senior reporters Was assigned to edit copy from the districts.

As can be seen from the data above the number of stories produced daily in Maseru is more or less comparable to that produced in the districts (about 8). What is important is not so much the quantity as the quality of the stories. What type of stories are these and to what extent do they address the information needs of the people in accordance with LENA's mandate'? Besides the question of usefulness or otherwise of these stories do they reach the target audiences?

As we have seen Radio Lesotho is the most important client of LENA because of the size of the audience it reaches which according to MISER (1995:25) is 71 percent. So roughly how many of LENA's stories are used by Radio Lesotho" We look at the stories used by Radio Lesotho during September 22-28 1997 (months randomly selected). The station has three main bulletins in English and Sesotho organized as follows:

Bulletin	Language
6.00 a.m.	Sesotho
7.00 a.m.	English
1.00 P.M.	Sesotho
1.30 p.m.	English
6.00 p.m.	English
7.00 p.m.	Sesotho

At 9.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. news headlines are presented (in Sesotho) on the station.

RADIO LESOTHO

Date	No. of News Items Used	Sources
22-9-97	15	LENA (7) Radio Reporter (6) SABA (1) Reuters (1)
23-9-97	18	LENA (9) Radio Reporter (3) SABA (4)

		Press Release (2)
24-9-97	18	LENA (6) Radio Reporter (1) SABA (5) Press Release (3) Un sourced (3)
25-9-97	18	LENA (8) Radio Reporter (4) SABA (4) Press Release (2)
26-9-97	14	LENA (9) Radio Reporter (3) SABA (1) Press Release (1)
27-9-97	13	LENA (6) Radio Reporter (1) SABA (5) Press Release (1)
28-9-97	12	LENA (5) Radio Reporter (2) SABA (3) Press Release (2)

LENA's supplied stories to Radio Lesotho during this period = 95 stories

LENA's used copy by Radio Lesotho = 41

Unused copy = 54 stories.

It can be assumed, however, that many of the stories that were not used in the Radio Lesotho's main news bulletins were used in the LENA's Radio slot (730p.m. - 8.00p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday).

In terms of the type of stories LENA covers, one finds that a good majority is predominated by Government officials. This, it may be argued, is understandable given that the agency is

government owned and controlled. What needs to be questioned though is the focus of such stories exclusively on officials to the total neglect of those the officials are supposed to be addressing. The story reproduced in Box I is typical of stories written on seminars/workshops/courses. It is from one of the southern districts of Lesotho.

In a seminar/workshop/course one finds a situation whereby discussions/exchange of views and ideas take place between resource persons and participants as well as amongst participants themselves. In the above story nothing is reported to have been said by the participants despite the fact that the course is in its second week. The story also lacks explanation, analysis and contextualization. For instance what is the situation of women and youth (in this district at least) and why were they singled out for this course? The last paragraph says similar courses have been held in numerous areas of the district since the beginning of the year but nothing is said about their impact (or lack of it) in the areas concerned. Other areas of news too are still subjected to the same approach which deals with news in a very superficial way. The story reproduced in Box 2 illustrates this point

Box I

AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT HOLDS COURSE FOR FARMERS

Quthing. Sept 01 (LENA)- The Department of Agriculture in Quthing is currently conducting a two-week course for about 20 farmers at Kubung in the Quthing district.

The District Nutrition Officer, Mrs. Mamolibeli Kosi, said the objective of the course which started on Monday last week is to equip participants with skills to assist them reach self-sufficiency in food production.

She pointed out that, among other topics, the course is focusing on water conservation and harvesting, sewing, cooking, manufacturing of products such as vices, Vaseline and others.

The course which is being attended by youth and women from Kubung and neighbouring

villages is expected to end on Friday.

Similar courses have been held in numerous areas of the district since the beginning of the year.

ENDS

LENA/JAN/PN

Box 2

POPULATION INCREASE LEADS TO POVERTY

Maseru, Nov 27 (LENA - Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association (LPPA) youth counsellor, Mrs Rahaba Mosenene says when Population increases in our country, arable land also decreases and will no longer meet agricultural needs.

Mrs. Mosenene said this on Thursday to the parents of Children Industry Project (CIS) who seem to have many children and are unable to give love to their children. She stated that parents that should not have many children because there is a high rate of unemployment and poverty, adding that children end up in the streets for survival.

She said there are some contraceptives such as condoms, pills, loops, spermicide and diaphragms which parents can use in order to reduce population.

She said the maximum number of children in a family can be four, adding that this helps parents to protect, care and love their children.

A social worker for CIP Miss Motseng Molomo said that some of CIP parents have seven children.

ENDS

LENA/DK

In the story in Box 2 nothing is said about the size of the population nor its rate of growth. We are also not told about the size of the arable land (that is decreasing). The focal point seems to be the Children Industry Project (CIS) but what is CIS is all about? There is no background information on what CIS is all about. *Even pitsos* (public gatherings) where important issues of national interest are addressed have not been treated differently. The story reproduced in Box 3 illustrates the point.

The stories reproduced in Boxes 1, 2 and 3 reflect a top-down flow of information and ideas from sources to receivers without any attempt on the part of reporters to seek feedback/reaction from the receivers of information. In the post-modernization era communication may be of many forms but as Jacobson (1994), amongst others, notes, it must in the end reflect the felt needs and interests of individuals receiving communication. This serves to underscore the need for relevant journalism training that prepares reporters to engage in sender and receiver- oriented kind of communication. The main advantage of this approach is that it allows for knowledge-sharing on a co-equal basis rather than a top-down transmission of information and ideas (Melkote, I 991:270).

Closely related to the prevalent weakness of treating beneficiaries/participants as passive entities is the problem of too many unresearched stories in terms of providing the public with background information on the issues/topics covered by the stories in question. The stories reproduced in Box 4 and Box 5 are typical examples. The story in Box 4, for example, is on very important topical subject of AIDS and yet there is no effort on the part of the writer to inform the public about the situation in Lesotho as regards HIV/AIDS. The story in Box 5 mentions 'maternal problems which perpetually kill many women in the country' but does not give the slightest indication as to the seriousness of the problem in terms of, for example, numbers involved.

Box 3

SHAKHANE DEFENDS LCD

Berea, June 15 (LENA)- The Secretary-General of the newly founded Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) says there has been b change to Government and that the only change has been that of the ruling party which is in parliamentary majority. Addressing about 300 ecstatic supporters of the separatist movement at the Teyateyaneng Pits Ground on Sunday, Mr Shakhane Mokhehle pointed out that, contrary to an outcry of a coup d'etat, Dr Ntsu Mokhehle is Lesotho's legitimate Prime Minister.

The member of parliament for Teyateyaneng constituency criticized the MP for Qeme, Mr Bofihla Nkuebe, who he said was elected to parliament on a Basutoland Congress Party ticket but later diverted.

Outlining the objects of the new party which he said puts a premium on discipline. Mr Mokhehle said it seeks to enhance democracy in Lesotho as well as regionally and advised its members to strengthen the party at grassroots level.

Some speakers at the same rally accused the courts of law of aggravating tensions which existed in the BCP and dismissed allegations that Shakhane Mokhehle was the cause of the disputes which led to the party's break-up. A representative of the Peka neighbouring constituency hinted at impending bloodshed there.

Among the guests of honour at the *pitso* were the mayor of Maseru. Mr Thabiso Molikeng. Others included representatives of the Khafung and Thupa Kubu constituencies.

ENDS

LENA/MC/PN

Box 4

CARE LESOTHO OPENS AIDS WORKSHOP

Maseru, June 20 (LENA)- A four day 'footballers against AIDS' workshop for 'C' division teams from around the country started at the 4Melesi Flotel on Tuesday.

Officially opening the workshop, the acting programme Manager of Care International in Lesotho Mr. Alan Hooker reminded the participants that there is still no cure for AIDS but there is prevention.

He said the vast majority of people who were dying from this disease lacked the knowledge to protect themselves.

“Nobody wants to become infected with HIV and yet people do. This year thousands will become infected in Lesotho and all of these unfortunate people will die,” added Mr.Hooker.

He also pointed out that nearly everybody at the course has heard about AIDS before and that hearing AIDS and knowing the facts about AIDS are two different things as they are a matter of life and death.

The workshop is aimed at providing participants with knowledge about AIDS and its dangers so that they could later disseminate about information AIDS.

ENDS

LENA/MM

Box 5

Berea. January 25 (LENA) - The Chief of Ha 'Mamathe, Chief Lesiea Koetje, has called public leaders' cooperation, to combat maternal problems which perpetually kill many women in the country.

Officially opening a two day safe motherhood workshop at Blue Mountain Inn in Teyateyaneng, Chief Koetje indicated that it is only if public leaders seriously address such problems that they could be resolved.

“Multi-sectoral participation is necessary since the matter affects all people,” he stressed.

Chief Koetje urged the participants to actively participate in the workshop, and come up with concrete recommendations which would assists in alleviating the problem.

At the same occasion, the District Secretary for BEREA, Mr. Tumisang Rasekolana, revealed that many maternal deaths are caused by ignorance and lack of health services.

ENDS

As LENA was established primarily to aid development strategies one would expect it to contribute meaningfully in helping the government and the public at large to ascertain the extent to which development projects are impacting on the intended beneficiaries. The agency' stories on projects, however, more often than not fail to reflect their impact on the lives of the intended beneficiaries. The story reproduced in Box 6 illustrates this point. What impact the six projects referred to in the first paragraph are having on the communities in question is not told and above all we are not told if these projects funded by an external source will be sustainable. The question of sustainability of these projects may never be known as most of these projects seem to be given coverage when some dignitary pays a visit to the area where they are. This problem is essentially caused by the fact that the agency treats development news as spot events.

Another weakness which is related to the tendency on the part of the agency' reporters not to do the necessary research for their stories is evident in their failure to contextualise and make relevant to Lesotho news/information material emanating outside the country. The story reproduced in Box 7 illustrates this point. The story is on women's needs and perspectives in contraception in developing countries. The agency, however, does not take the trouble to inform the public about the situation in Lesotho as regards the subject in question. This needs to be done for, *inter- alia*, comparison and possible lessons to be learned from the information. The public, understandably, needs to be informed about what is happening in other countries as Lesotho is not an island. This, however, needs to be done in a manner that relates to the local situation.

Box 6

US AMBASSADOR VISITS PROJECTS

Leribe, June 28 (LENA) - The U.S. Ambassador to Lesotho Mr. Bismarck Myrick visited six projects funded by the Ambassador's Self Help Program in Leribe and ButheButhe. All these projects were initiated by the communities themselves, and managed by them.

Projects visited include a poultry egg production project which is part of a food self

sufficiency program at St.

Michael's High School in Mpharane, near Maputsoe in Leribe. The Ambassador presented cheques to two projects of multi-purpose cooperatives in Leribe, one for the purchase of a hammer mill at Mahobong, and the others for equipment and material for a women's clothing production unit.

He also visited sites of two school projects funded by the Self Help program: a four classroom building for Khukhune Primary School in Butha-Buthe, and two classrooms for Mount Royal High School in Leribe.

The U.S. Ambassador's Self Help program funds a variety of small projects in all ten districts of Lesotho. Other projects this year include roof tile production by a cooperative in Mokhotlong; a pre-school and school latrine project in Qacha's Nek, school roofing projects in Thaba-Tseka, Mafeteng, Maseru and Quthing, and a school electrification project in Mohale's Hoek.

Projects for 1995 are already well underway. Communities interested in applying for 93 Self Help funds may pick up application forms from the U.S. Embassy, the American Cultural Centre or the Peace Corps office in Maseru beginning in September of this year. Successful applicants will be announced in March, 1996.

ENDS

LENA/PK

Box 7

WOMEN'S CONTRACEPTION NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES IGNORED FOR LONG

Maseru, August 30 (LENA) - Women's needs and perspectives in contraception have not been adequately taken into account, by both the developers of contraceptives and those who provide them.

According to the World health Organisation (WHO) press statement, in 1990. 53 percent of

couples in the developing countries were using a method of contraception of one kind or another, compared with only 14 percent 25 years earlier.

Nevertheless, Studies show that there are still tens of millions of women around the world who state they want no more children in the near future or have reached their desired family size, but who are not using any method of contraception.

"One explanation for this is the lack of access to family planning services. The other key reason is that women's lives, needs and perspectives have not been properly taken into account", the statement said.

The special programme of research, development and research training human reproduction based at WHO, which was established in 1972 to develop new contraceptives and to examine the long-term safety of such products, has initially focussed mainly on scientific leads.

In the past five years, it has taken up the challenge to integrate more effectively women's perspectives into its work, particularly by promoting dialogue between women's health and rights advocacy groups, scientists and policy-makers.

The programme has carried out ground breaking work in assessing the safety of oral contraceptive pills, as well as injectable and implantable contraceptives in relationship to reproductive tract cancers. breast cancer and cardiovascular disease.

This work turn, continues the press statement, has helped service providers to give counselling to women.

ENDS

LENA/MM

6.3.4 Revenue

LENA's clientele has been dealt with in Chapter Five. As far as revenue is concerned LENA's revenue (from sale of news) in the fiscal year 1995/96 was about \$4,000 (US). Its recurrent expenditure in the same year was about \$161,000 (US). In 1991/92 the revenue was in the region of about \$6,000 (US). The decrease is attributed to the relocation of some foreign embassies from Lesotho to South Africa since 1994 after South Africa's first Successful non-racial general elections. The embassies include those of Sweden, Germany and Russia.

Embassies constitute the bulk of LENA's paying clientele. Subscribers pay at the rate of about \$55 (US) per month. Non-paying but regular clients of LENA are the Radio Lesotho, the two government newspapers, the Royal Palace and the Ministry of Foreign affairs which sends selected news items to Lesotho embassies abroad. In contrast Radio Lesotho's revenue for the year 1995/96 was about \$831,000 (US).

6.3.5 Autonomy

The UNESCO Report (I 992) and the Director of LENA suggest that autonomy for the agency would go a long way towards enhancing the effectiveness of the agency. A questionnaire (survey) administered by this researcher amongst 18 of the 20 reporters of the agency, revealed a unanimous Support for the agency to be granted autonomy on ground that such a step would enable them to write critically and more freely about, in particular, the government of the day. Operations of the mass media, both at the national and international levels, should be determined primarily by professional media personnel committed to the public interest without undue government or commercial influence (MacBride Round Table on Communication, 1990:43). The question is can granting of the autonomous status to a news agency necessarily make it more effective in addressing the informational needs of the majority of the people? Will it, for example, be in a position to make the government more accountable to the electorate?

The Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Mpine Tente, says the Government is committed to granting autonomy not only to LENA but also to Radio Lesotho and Lesotho Television. In an interview with this writer, tente said the Government did not want these important news media to be viewed as nothing more than mouthpieces of the government of the day. "Government believes that these media will be more effective in development communication if they are credible in the eyes of the public." Towards this end the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been instrumental in the efforts which culminated in the production of the Lesotho Media Policy document in 1997.

The Lesotho Media Policy document recognizes and underscores the need to government to accord both the public broadcaster and the news agency the editorial and operational independence they need to effectively fulfil their public functions:

At a minimum this requires a statutory guarantee of independence and a clear prohibitions of government interference in any aspect of operation. Both should be governed by boards which are independent of government. Government officials, members of parliament and political party representatives should not be eligible to serve on the governing boards (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:14).

The Principal Secretary was less happy about LENA's performance in the districts where she said the agency was experiencing a high turnover of reporters. She suspected that the problem was caused by working conditions which were not comparable to those in the capital (more on this in the next chapter).

Since Radio Lesotho enjoys high listenership and is the main client of LENA, granting of autonomy could be an important step towards facilitating more and freer flow of information. The crucial question however is whether such a move would result in more people having access to information that relates to the quality of their lives. People must not think that private ownership of media is necessarily a better option to government ownership. The editorial policy of private media is viewed as serving the political ambition and or economic interests of the proprietors (Parenti. 1988). Since the chief purpose of a privately owned press is to produce a profit for the owners, development subjects are taken up only if they are considered profitable.

Coverage of development

problems is only slight and sporadic and when such issues are taken up they are looked at from the perspective of the urban groups (Hedebro, 1982:40-41).

Autonomy for the agency would mean, at least implicitly, less government interference in its editorial policy and therefore a freer flow of information. As long as the agency operates within centralized media systems, however, the majority of the people to whom development-oriented communication should be directed will remain disadvantaged. The degree of free flow of information is not only a function of who owns the media but also how much access to information the people have (Okwudishu, 1988:12-15). Care should be taken not to believe that only exclusively privately owned press can advance the democratic aspirations of the people. The government has as much right in the field of information distribution as individuals, cooperatives or corporate bodies (Ansah, 1991:30-31).

The question of autonomy, therefore, needs to be discussed within the framework of a participatory approach to communication and beyond the dichotomy of private or state ownership of the communications. Participatory communication has been defined as that type of communication in which all the interlocutors are free and have equal access to the means to express their viewpoints, feelings and experiences (Diaz-Bordenave. 1994:41). Face to face dialogue is basic to this approach if communication is to become an integral part of the development process (Jacobson, 1994:72). Authoritative controls tend to inhibit public discussion and restrict the free flow of information thereby stifling and negating efforts at genuine human development. To contribute meaningfully to the democratic process, the media should be able to criticize government decisions which are not in the best of the people, denounce abuses of power in society and defend human rights (Ansah, 1986:13; Ansah, 1988:15; UNESCO, 1980:265).

The fundamental reason for the establishment of LENA was to bring, in particular, ruralites (who form more than 80 percent of the Population) into the mainstream communication process. With this in mind, the next chapter deals specifically with rural reporting.

HAPTER SEVEN

7. THE LESOTHO NEWS AGENCY (LENA) AND RURAL REPORTING

7.1 Introduction

Most countries in Africa have rural development as the focus of their national socio-economic and technological development programmes. The place of communication in all this is recognized but not given the attention it deserves by governments and other change agents (Nwosu, 1988:37). In Lesotho the opening of LENA offices in all the districts of the country was an attempt on the part of the Lesotho government to enhance the development process by bringing ruralites, into the mainstream communication process (UNESCO Report, 1992). This chapter sets out to argue that although extending LENA's operational structures into the districts of the country was a step in the right direction, it is highly inadequate to bring about the desired results unless major structural problems and peculiar features which hinder the efficacy of both development efforts and development communication in rural areas, in

particular, are adequately addressed. Stressing this point, Godwin Chu (1994:42) states that unless a country can break up the major constraints in its social structure through a fundamental social transformation, there can be little hope for effective use of manpower and resources that will be essential for development.

Various development communication scholars have identified the problems/constraints which impact negatively on rural development. Notable amongst these problems are: urban bias development strategies; concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a small elite; high illiteracy rate in rural areas; inappropriate language communication; absence of rural-oriented news reporting; glaring disparities in communication facilities and indifference to traditional media which are predominant in rural areas (See Ademolekun, 1990; James'. 1994; Boafo, 1987; Ansah, 1986; Melkote. 1991).

7.1.1 Framework

The problem with mass media in Lesotho is that they are working within a context in which development strategies and policies are determined and defined by the political and economic elite without the participation of the intended beneficiaries (Mda, 1993). People who are the objects of policy need to be involved in the definition, design and execution of the development process. True participation has to go beyond higher productivity and better health habits, to bring about conscientization of the masses on their extremely unequal social and spatial structures (Melkote, 1991:192).

7.2 Urban development biases

urban biases are a predominant feature almost everywhere. People in rural areas have very restricted participation in economic and social life in the developing world. The rural per capita income in many countries is around half that in towns and cities. Rural people have much less access to Government. Despite making up around two-thirds of the population, they receive on average less than a quarter of the education, health, water and sanitation services (Human Development Report, 1993:26). In Lesotho urban areas are generally the best-off areas within the country. Poverty is greater in rural than in urban areas. Over 80 percent of Basotho households are rural. About 54 percent of Basotho households are poor compared with a Maseru (capital city) average of 28 percent and other urban areas' average of 27 percent. Malnutrition levels among children under five are unacceptably high everywhere, but urban

children are considerably better off than children in mountain areas. Such infrastructure as piped water, latrines, road access, seats and desks are absent in most remote schools and present in the urban and peri-urban primary schools (Sechaba Consultants, 1994; Pathway out of Poverty Report, 1996).

7.3 Communication facilities

The effectiveness of mass media systems in transmitting ideas and information and generating feedback about development-oriented programmes, activities and other issues among the national population is partly a factor of the geographic reach of the systems. Media systems which do not extend significantly into communities where the majority of the population lives cannot adequately respond to the information needs of the society. Content analytical studies indicate that news and information about events from urban centres, especially news concerning the political leadership and other socio-economic elite. Occupy disproportionately more space in the press and more air time in the broadcast media than news and information about events in the rural communities (Boafo, 1987:29-31).

In a national survey on listenership, readership and viewership in which 7394 respondents took part in Lesotho, over fifty percent said they owned radio sets in their households. Most were said to be in working order and used batteries. About 13 percent of the total population sampled owned a television set. The order of distribution of television ownership by district in percentage was Maseru about 50 percent; Leribe 18 percent; Maseru's Hoek 8 percent; Mafeteng 7 percent; Berea 6 percent; Butha-Buthe 5 percent; Quthing 5 percent. The mountain districts of Thaba-Tseka, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek constituted only 1 percent (MISER, 1995:23)). Ownership of newspapers and readership patterns have been dealt with in Chapters 6 and just like television and Radio, these media facilities are skewed in favour of urban areas.

7.4 The need to decentralize media systems

To ensure a certain amount of access and participation by a larger section of the population the most obvious solution would be to decentralize the media system so that localized media could concern themselves with problems originating from the localities within which they operate. Localization makes it possible for media personnel to become familiar with the socio-cultural and economic conditions under which the masses live and for citizens in the mass audience to actively participate in the activities of the media. This is liberation through communication

(Moemeka, 1988:25-26). A radical and profound restructuring of communication systems is a prerequisite for an effective utilization of communication strategies in rural development. Such a restructuring must be aimed at:

- A wider geographic reach and equity in the distribution of the power, skills and resources of communication technologies;
- wider participation and cooperation of rural communities in information generation and dissemination; and
- increased accessibility to national information networks for the rural population (Boafo, 1985:88-89).

In Lesotho the need to de-urbanize and decentralize media systems is even more imperative in view of the fact that the percentage of the population living in urban centres is estimated at only 18.5 (Ministry of Planning, 1994) and yet media facilities are highly skewed in its favour. Communication programmes are planned from the capital city from where messages flow, through notably radio, to rural communities. Communication flows in a single direction and feedback is limited. The content of the programmes is decided centrally, based on opinions of the development communication experts as to what rural communities need and want to know (Mda, 1993:35). There is strong evidence that centralized media systems are susceptible to political manipulation and facilitate the utilization of communication resources and institutions much more for propaganda, indoctrination and trivia than for genuine socio-economic development (Boafo, 1987:29; Mody, 1991; Mda, 1993).

7.5 Rural-oriented reporting

Coverage by LENA in the capital focuses mainly on government officials, the political and economic elite. The idea behind extending the agency's operations to the districts was to reduce elitist coverage in favour of people-oriented coverage. This, however, does not seem to have been achieved to any satisfactory degree. The agency's coverage in the districts largely revolves around district authorities partly because reporters do not have their own transport to use to go to rural areas. Their visits to rural areas are dependent on visits to such places by district authorities. There is therefore a need for information transmission networks that extend to

villages on a more organised if not coordinated manner. This could mean, for instance, more and closer cooperation between LENA and field workers of other ministries such as Health, Agriculture and Rural Development. One way of achieving this could be for the Government to ensure that the agency forms part of the Government's national development plans and strategies within the context of an integrated approach to development communication.

An integration of communication into development plans could, among other things, facilitate greater cooperation between the news agency, private institutions and government ministries, particularly the Ministry of Local Government which deals predominantly with rural development. The Government's programme strategies in relation to rural development includes, notably, creating awareness for increased people's participation through self-help activities, decentralization of expert manpower to support the on-going programmes at local level and facilitate communication between villages (Ministry of Planning, 1992:116). At the practical level, however, very little anything has been done to concretize these noble objectives. Appropriate organizational structure and mode of operation could therefore enable the agency to underpin these and other development related activities.

One way in which district reporters could write more stories in which rural people feature could be by increasing the number of reporters per district office. Currently each district office is manned by only one reporter who spends most of the time reporting on events involving, in particular, the District Secretary who is in charge of the district. An additional reporter would be in a position to pursue other stories of human interest. This would, potentially, increase the volume of news emanating from the rural areas. It must be pointed out, though, that with the existing centralized media systems, there is no guarantee that any increase in the volume of news from rural areas will necessarily lead to a concomitant increase in its publicity. Alternatively, reporters need to be trained to use appropriate news packaging strategies. One of these strategies involves writing news in a way that still gives publicity to public officials but highlights the importance of the event in question in terms of, for example, its impact on the people (Nwosu, 1988).

7.6 District reporter at work

A typical working day in the district starts at around 8.00am. On arriving at his/her office the reporter scribbles his/her diary and sends it to LENA headquarters in Maseru either by telex or

phone. He/she then rushes to the office of the District Secretary (DS) to find out about his schedule of activities for the day which might need coverage. As the most senior government official and one who is in charge of the whole district, the DS is a link between the district and the central government. He is therefore accorded high respect and his official engagements, as a rule, must be covered by the LENA reporter. Once news material has been collected, the reporter writes his/her story and then send to Maseru either by telex or phone. The telex machines which the agency uses are the more modern type which serve as word processors too. Thus many of the functions which would normally be used to write a story on a computer such editing, moving paragraphs and so on are available in these machines.

The offices LENA reporters use in the districts do not belong to the agency. They have been loaned to the agency by the DSs who in turn are answerable to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The DSs attach so much importance to the coverage of events in their districts that they go out of their way to also make available government residential accommodation to LENA reporters on a preferential basis. Thus all reporters in the districts have government accommodation. By contrast none of the Maseru based reporters has government accommodation. Thus there is a strong link between the agency and the DSs. In an interview with this writer, Nkoe Thakali, the Director of the agency, explained that technically district based reporters were administratively responsible to the DSs. "They need to know about our reporters' whereabouts on a daily basis partly to monitor their conduct/discipline. The professional side, however, is strictly our domain and we do not allow them to interfere with it." Thakali said maintaining cordial relationship between the agency and the DSs was of paramount importance as both were promoting development. "In any case we cannot afford to antagonise them as we depend on them for office and residential accommodation. Furthermore the bulk of official government activities revolves around them."

Compared to the Maseru based reporters are more independent in that they are bosses of themselves while the reporters in Maseru are being constantly watched by the editorial management. Their conspicuous disadvantage is lack of transport which would enable them to, for example, cover events in the villages on a more regular basis. A media consultant who conducted a course on rural news writing wrote in his report on the course that "the question of transport needs to be seriously looked into if they (reporters) are not to become District Secretaries' personal reporters (Munyuki, 1997:5).

7.7 LENA's assessment

LENA management and reporters as well as the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting think that, although there is still room for improvement, the agency is doing relatively well. The real and true however, must be the people the agency is intended to serve (see, for example, Mody, 1991). With this in mind, this researcher interviewed authorities in eight of the nine districts of the country (excluding Maseru). The districts are Quthing, Mohale's Hoek, Mafeteng, Thaba-Tseka. Mokhotlong. Berea, Buthe-Buthe and Leribe. A focus group comprising representatives of Village Development Councils (VDCs) in the Mohale's Hoek district was also interviewed, The VDCs are democratically elected villagers charged with the responsibility of spearheading development efforts at the village level. A questionnaire was also administered *amongst LENA reporters to establish* what they thought of their work. The interviews were conducted during March 1996. The only interviews I conducted in November 1997 were those with the District Secretary of Butha-Buthe and the acting District Secretary of Leribe.

The following is a summary of what the district authorities, the VDCs and LENA reporters had to say (in that order):

7.8 District authorities

The District Secretary, Tumisang Rasekulana, said LENA's main contribution as a news agency was the fact that the capital city no longer dominated national news the way it did before.

"There is now more news about other districts and this enables us to compare ourselves with other districts and gauge how far behind or ahead we are." Rasekulana said districts were in competition with each other to set the pace of development. "It is a healthy competition though as we exchange visits to learn from each other." He said the presence of LENA in the district was crucial as there were no other media personnel in the district. Khoase Letsoisa who is the District Secretary, Thaba-Tseka, was quite happy that LENA had opened an office in Thaba-Tseka which forms part of the remote highlands region. For him the difference LENA has made is not just in terms of giving publicity to activities and events taking place in this remote and mountainous district. "To us LENA's presence means the Government cares to know about our welfare as one of the districts quite remote from the capital. "The DS pointed out that the highlands region was the least developed. For this reason "we in this region have to make the

loudest noise through media such as LENA to appeal for assistance not only from the government but also from private organizations.”

Letsoisa regretted that many of their development problems and activities were not covered because there was only one reporter to cover the whole district. He said this problem was compounded by the fact that LENA reporters in the districts did not have their own transport. He felt it was unfair to expect a reporter to always rely on lifts to carry assignments for which transport was needed. His concerns were echoed by the District Secretary of Butha-Buthe, Seamatha Seamatha and the acting District Secretary of Leribe, Paramente Matela who both felt that “if those two problems were addressed LENA would do even better than it is doing at the moment”. Letsoisa pointed out that more than any other district. Thaba Tseka needed to be given more coverage as the centre of the multi-billion dollar Lesotho Highlands Water Project. "This project is set to contribute significantly to the economy of this country and also puts Lesotho on the international map."

Qobete Letsie. Deputy District Secretary for Mafeteng, went further to suggest that the proposed local government needed a lot of publicity particularly in terms of establishing people's reactions. "We need to know whether local people understand and support the idea so that we are on the same wavelength." He said some chiefs in his district were very hostile to the idea of giving more powers to democratically elected Village Development Councillors (VDCs) as part of local governance and had not allowed elections of VDCs to take place in areas under their jurisdiction. “These are serious problems affecting the welfare of many of our poor people struggling to make a living. Coverage of such problems and measures proposed to deal with them need a lot of constant publicity."

The Deputy District Secretary said the LENA reporter in the district was doing a good job and that the only problem was that there were just too many activities to be covered by one reporter. He said most of the activities and events covered were those at which the DS was in attendance and this constituted only a fraction of activities taking place in the district. He said he would like to know more about activities and events taking place where government officials were not in attendance. He complained that when the only reporter they have goes on leave or is ill they are never given a replacement. The District Secretary for Mokhotlong, Nkhaulise Leshota, said because of LENA he now appreciated the important role media can

play in motivating people. He personally felt highly motivated when he heard reports over the radio about events and activities taking place in his district. He recalled that in the days of colonialism, Mokhotlong was one of the two districts (the other being Qacha's Nek) to which civil servants considered to be troublesome were banished as a form of punishment. He said even long after independence this practice continued though to a lesser extent.

"Even today the perception is still there among civil servants that once you are transferred to this district you should forget about promotion as authorities in Maseru tend to forget about your existence" The DS said the presence of LENA in the capital served in a way to remind the government of the day on a continual basis the development backlog of the district which has been neglected over many decades.

The District Secretary saw LENA's main contribution as being to highlight the unique problems faced by people living in mountainous places like Mokhotlong where economic infrastructures leave much to be desired. He said heavy summer rains usually isolate villages for long periods as footbridges that join them are easily submerged. Leshota said school children were forced to miss classes during heavy rains which sometimes lasted for weeks. He said winter was the worst time for people living in the district because of heavy snowfalls which cut off the district from the rest of the country. "Heavy snowfalls result in loss of livestock and human lives especially in respect of young herd-boys at cattle posts. Serious shortages of food and fuel are also experienced. "The DS said through LENA the district authorities were able to cry for help in time. Leshota said LENA was also making a positive contribution in the political arena. "Members of parliament spend most of their time in parliament in Maseru and I understand that LENA's news reports are a useful source of information about what is going on in their constituencies."

The DS, Sekoala Macheli, felt that LENA's presence in the districts promoted the feeling of oneness as a nation. He said as Lesotho was a small country it did not make sense not to know what was going on in neighbouring districts. The DS recalled that before LENA came to the districts, more often than not, the news the national radio station broadcast was often than not about Maseru, the capital. "That has since changed with the establishment of LENA although more still needs to be done." The DS pointed out that the publicity LENA was giving to development activities in the district was a source of inspiration to his administration. His

complaint was that when a LENA reporter went on leave he/she was never replaced to continue coverage. "This clearly shows that we need more than one reporter at the district level."

7.9 Village Development Councillors and LENA

A focus group comprising representatives of village development Councillors from different villages of the Whale's Hoek district was interviewed by this researcher about LENA. Most of the councillors had heard news stories over Radio Lesotho attributed to LENA. They were also aware that there was a LENA reporter in their district although they were not aware that they could take information to him/her for publicity purposes. According to the councillors the publicity given to events taking place in their districts was LENA's main achievement since opening an office in their district in 1987. They stressed, however, that although they welcomed the development, it was highly inadequate as many events and activities, especially in remote villages, were not covered. The councillors also found it incomprehensible that sometimes weeks went by without hearing a single item on their district on Radio Lesotho despite the presence of a full-time reporter in their district.

The councillors noted that in 1994 when all of a sudden LENA's news and current affairs programme was discontinued; news from the districts got a raw deal. The bulletin was precisely meant to give more airtime to news emanating from the districts. According to the councillors, the bulletin kept them in the picture as to what was happening not only in their own district but also in the other districts. They said giving publicity to their activities meant a lot to them in at least three respects:

- their achievements became nationally known and this was a source of pride to them;
- they felt relieved that their problems and concerns were known (as a result of publicity) to Government and other interested parties who could assist in their solutions; and
- as long as they kept on crying for assistance where it was needed, the Government would be forced to engage in dialogue with them to find solutions.

Some councillors said they had on a number of occasions invited the LENA reporter in the district only to be told that due to lack of transport the reporter would not be able to accede to their request. On media policy the councillors stressed the need to all stakeholders to be represented in a media council "that would see to it that all sectors of the society received a fair

share of media coverage." The councillors argued that as agents spearheading development efforts at the local level, it was imperative that they be directly represented in such a council. If granted representation, the councillors said they would from the onset press for at least five things:

- the reinstatement of LENA's news and current affairs programme;
- news and programmes emanating from the districts be given a fair airtime that recognizes that the majority of the people are in rural areas;
- mechanisms be put in place to facilitate more interaction between LENA and village development councils especially in remote villages;
- LENA reporters in the districts be provided with transport to enable them do extensive coverage of their areas of assignment;
- and districts to be manned by more than one reporter in view of the amount of work that needs coverage.

7.10. What LENA reporters think about LENA

At full strength the agency has about 20 reporters. This researcher conducted a survey (questionnaire) amongst 18 reporters, Only one respondent was a university graduate. The rest did not go beyond 'O' level. The objective was to find out, *inter alia*, their perception of development and the role of LENA in development. Their perception of development was important in that it largely determined what they reported and the way in which they reported. It was also useful in determining whether their perception was compatible with that of the ordinary people. They were also asked to evaluate LENA's performance and suggest what ought to be done to make the agency perform more effectively.

Only eleven out of eighteen attempted to define the term development as they understood it. Answers ranged from economic growth to an improvement in the well-being of the people. Only one reporter mentioned that such a change should involve participation of the people in the decision making process. With one exception all the respondents (including those who had not defined development) said LENA was making a positive contribution to development activities taking place in the country. The respondent who felt LENA was performing 'dismally' did not explain why he thought so.

About 73 percent of the respondents, 46 percent of whom are presently working in the districts, said they did not mind working in the districts. For most of them the main attraction to work in the district was the fact that "one was a boss to oneself". The main and common complaint, though, was lack of transport to facilitate mobility to different villages where development activities take place. There was also a strong perception amongst them that reporters working at the head-office were given preferential treatment when it came to training opportunities, particularly, externally based training. About five reporters preferred working in the capital. Two of them have been working in the districts since they were employed and would like to have the experience of working in the capital. Reporters based in Maseru do have more training opportunities. One example is the part-time Diploma in Mass Communication at the Maseru based Institute of Extra Mural Services of the National University of Lesotho (NUL). In an interview with this writer, the Information Officer of NUL, Khoeli Pholosi, said the programme was a result of a request from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to the University to help it meet the country's training needs in journalism and mass communication. It is wholly funded by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It was introduced in 1996 and has an enrolment of about 75 students. About 20 of these come from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. About six come from LENA.

University graduates in particular seem to resent working in the districts. LENA records show that the first university graduate, one Paleho Mabele, was sent to the districts in 1988/89. He worked for a few months in the Butha-Buthe district and deserted immediately after he found a teaching post in South Africa. The second graduate, one Malume Mohale was posted at the Mafeteng district in 1993. The following year she left after she got a job in the private sector. In an interview with this writer, Mohale said she left LENA because she did not want to work in the districts. "Life in the districts is simply boring." She said she still liked journalism but was not prepared to work anywhere except in Maseru (the capital). The only university graduate reporter left with LENA, Teboho Mposho, was transferred to the Mohale's Hoek district in 1996. When this researcher met him, just over a month in his new assignment, Mposho said he was also looking for a job elsewhere. His dissatisfaction with working in the district stemmed from lack of transport for district reporters. He said he could not understand how they were expected to get news from villages without being provided with transport to move around. In an interview with this writer, the Director of LENA, Nkoe Thakali, said the Ministry of

Information and Broadcasting had more than eleven vehicles at the headquarters but authorities appeared reluctant to allocate some of them for use by reporters in the districts.

An overwhelming number of respondents saw LENA's main challenge as being to provide adequate and effective coverage of the whole country, particularly rural areas. All the respondents favoured an autonomous status for LENA on the ground that such a status would enhance their freedom to report without restrictions especially on matters in which the government was involved. They said they felt inhibited to criticize the government for fear of losing their Jobs. Despite the potentially important role that Journalists can perform, their effectiveness may be undermined by a sense of futility regarding their professional roles. In many developing countries journalists believe that they neither exert a significant influence on political affairs nor enjoy a broad base of public trust. This sense of futility may derive in part from the relatively restricted freedom of the press characteristic of many developing countries of Asia and Africa (Kim & Hoh, 1974:73).

A possible solution to the problem of subjecting the press to undue restrictions is provision of legal protection of press freedom in the constitution to insulate Journalists against any form of harassment and undue interference in their work (Ansah, 1991). While this argument may be valid, we must not forget the ease with which African governments suspend or amend constitutions to suit their agenda. In Lesotho, while government employed journalists may feel inhibited to report as freely as they would wish, the private media, by and large, enjoys press freedom (Kasoma, 1992). This is important in view of the fact that private media has no less than ten newspapers compared to the government's

one newspaper. Moreover the two newspapers with the highest circulation figures in the country are private newspapers.

Over 90 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that LENA had greatly enhanced news and information flows in the country by opening offices in all the districts of the country. With the exception of one, all the respondents said the short courses in reporting to which they had been exposed were highly inadequate to equip them with the skills necessary to do the kind of reporting that was expected of them. One reporter who did a nine months' course in 1987 complained that she was feeling rusty because she had not had, even, a refresher course ever since. Most of the current reporters have received journalism training (basic skills course) for

a period ranging from three to four weeks. Most of them were trained as replacements of those who have left for greener pastures. Since the LENA was handed over to the government by UNESCO in 1992. LENA organised journalism training courses have been of a maximum of one month duration.

7.11 Analysis of the field study

An overwhelming majority of LENA reporters see part of their work as being to perform a watch dog function over the government of the day. They, however, feel inhibited to do so by virtue of being civil servants. Fear of losing one's job in the event one's news report is deemed inimical to the interests of the establishment seems to be the main factor restraining them from writing critically about the government of the day. Such fears are not without justification as civil servants journalists are expected to work strictly within the confines of 'development journalism' which requires them to support development efforts which are in consonance with national social policies. In theory 'development journalism' model includes the duty to report development programs that are not working. In reality, however, this is not the case. Journalists are often fired or penalized for commenting critically on development or other sensitive local issues (Murphy & Scotton, 1987:26). The society can benefit a lot more meaningfully if press freedom is used to influence public and private conduct towards the achievement of the greatest possible measure of 'Justice in society (Macebuh, 1987: Moemeka, 1994).

Many of the limitations placed on reporting come not from direct censorship but from self-censorship from journalists who design their stories so as to anticipate complaints from superiors. This anticipatory avoidance makes direct intervention by owners a less frequent necessity (Parenti, 1986:36). Parent, warns that many people who hold their fire eventually end up never finding occasion to do battle because after a while, anticipatory avoidance becomes a kind of second nature. The current wave of democratization in Africa offers a chance to journalists to develop journalism that promotes and defends democratic governance (Kasoma, 1994:1 1). The question is does this extend to the government press, and if so, to what extent? The freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press (Parenti, 1986). Is it realistic to expect the government press to criticize the government of the day? Do private media, for example, criticize their owners? If one were to say, for example, that the

government press should expose the government's wrong doings but in a constructive way, who defines 'constructive criticism' and for whom?

The freedom of civil servants journalists to criticize or not to criticize the government of the day needs to be analysed in a proper context. In the first instance, the government press, as Ansah (1986) notes, suffers from credibility problems. In the case of Lesotho, for example, in addition to the credibility problem government journalists are not treated differently from other civil servants. They are subjected to the same rules and regulations governing all civil servants. One of the things these rules and regulations stress is loyalty to the government of the day. There is therefore a need to view freedom of expression for civil servants journalists in relation to what is expected of them in terms of conduct and behaviour under the civil service rules and regulations.

What may appear to be an infringement of a civil servant's right of freedom of expression could be found to be compatible with the civil service rules and regulations. As Ruijter (1989) notes, this is a serious problem that has effectively undermined the role and power of the media in Africa. A Radio Lesotho senior programmes officer who played a tape on the air in which an opposition member of parliament had accused the government of telling lies to the public was interdicted and demoted on being found guilty by the adjudicator. The interdiction was not based on whether or not the contents of the tape were true, but on the officer's defiance of the authorities's instruction that the tape be not aired (see MISA, 1996).

Both the district authorities and VDCs bemoan the fact that districts are allocated one reporter each despite a myriad of activities that need to be covered in each district. The belief seems to be that an additional reporters would result in more events being covered and consequently more publicity being given to more events. This, however, may not necessarily be the case. The problem goes beyond the number of events covered. This researcher, for example, while in the Whale's Hoek district found out that the reporter there filed stories on a fairly regular basis, at least one a day. During a focus group interview (by this writer) in the same district, councillors were agreed that in the last two weeks they had heard only one news item on Radio Lesotho about some event that had taken place in their district. The problem seems to lie in the centralized nature of the country's media system. Radio Lesotho which happens to be the only radio station in the country does not have a deliberate policy to accord a more equitable airtime

to rural news. Consequently its news bulletins tend to be dominated by the socio-political elite with very little room left for news that involve ordinary people. Even if more reporters could be deployed at the district level such a move would only be meaningful if more air time was given to news reports emanating from the districts.

7.12 LENA and traditional media

Many communication scholars have bemoaned the fact that political leadership in the developing countries continue to use modern mass media to communicate with the people they govern despite the fact that these media are highly centralized, have a limited reach and are generally structured and operated in a manner that is not conducive to a two-way flow of information and ideas. They have therefore called for the use of both the modern mass media and traditional media which are predominant in rural areas to promote development (see for example, Ochola, 1983:60-61; James, 1994:333; Moemeka, 1994:71). Traditional media have been defined as indigenous modes of communication which seem to focus on interpersonal channels and networks of communication, such as meeting places, community tea houses, market places, religious centres and social community institutions (Wang & Dissanayake, 1984:22). This chapter examines the plausibility of this suggestion in the case of Lesotho.

In Lesotho's traditional societies various means of communication systems were employed to transmit messages and information from one place to another. The shape of the communication system was determined by the historical and political situations obtaining within and without the Basotho community. Incessant border clashes between the Boers and the Basotho between 1800 and 1900 led to the intensification of the communication system especially the messenger-sending system. There was a network of communication on the basis of messengers posted mostly at every *khotla* and at such vital positions to facilitate the uninterrupted transmission of messages and information (Ndovorwi 1977:8-9). The *Khotla* was both a court of law and a place of where men gathered to discuss the affairs of the village. Visitors from other places were most welcome at the *khotla* because they brought news about occurrences outside the Community. Some of the information brought to the *Khoda* emanated from women at home and there was a network of transmission channels through the extended family, friends and neighbours (Mda, 1993:63).

Traditionally women had few formal, but many informal means of communicating with one another and passing on news and information. Whereas men had the *khotla* to meet and discuss current affairs, women mostly communicated through communal activities such as washing, communal work parties, funerals and weddings. A major transmission medium in the village was the *pitso* (public meeting) which was a gathering of all adults. It was a two-way communication. The chief did not go to the *pitso* to give instructions, but to get the views of the people which he would base his decisions. However, traditionally women sat on the periphery and were not expected to play a major part in the proceedings (Ministry of Planning/LTNICEF. 1996:152-153; Mda, 1993: 63).

Ordinarily and on the day to day basis in the villages, any person available could be sent to convey a message. In accordance with the custom, however, young people were not expected to send their elders on errands. A person was sent only if the message was private, or was to be confined to certain circles, such as a family. Persons were sent to inform a friend or relative about death, the birth of a child and such ordinary news. Otherwise the rest of the villagers and neighbours would know what happened by special sounds made by the immediate family members. In the case of death women made a shrieking sound of mourning. When announcing the birth of a child, women ululated, also a white string was tied across the door warning men not to enter the room. The news would then quickly spread throughout the community (Ndovorwi 1977: 10).

At the national and international levels a corps of specially trained messengers were used to transmit news and messages. These messengers had to undergo the same training and medical treatment " to purge them of evil and confirming spirits". The rite was also intended to cleanse messengers of all the thick sputum which otherwise prevented them from running fast and for a long time. They were also taught how to interpret some signs especially those pertaining to war. The Basotho corps of messengers were divided into three departments, namely, the *Lititimi* (messengers and runners of errands), *Lihloela* (spies or army vanguards) and Maqosa (messenger ambassadors). These kept the Basotho nation in contact with the outside world especially," with states of Southern Africa. There was no clear cut division of duties and functions to be performed by the messengers. Most functions overlapped and were interdependent (Ndovorwi 1977:17).

Lititimi were responsible for communicating all official messages, notices and information within the country. They operated between the King's court, the chief's courts and the people. The primary and most popularly used method was the actual speeding to the purported destination of the message. This method, also known as the oral or verbal method, left little room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the message, as the reply could be given and be received in full with further elaboration and comments by the messenger. *Lititimi* also occasionally used signs such as fires and smoke to transmit messages (Ndovorwi 1977:11).

Lihloela were mainly responsible for intelligence work inside and outside the country. They also helped to plot military strategies against potential enemies. The *Maqosa* normally resided at the King's or Chief's court in their own country and kept on moving between Lesotho and neighbouring countries. One of their duties was to keep the neighbouring nations in a peaceful frame of mind. To this end they often carried gifts and such information and messages that pleased the host rulers so as to promote good neighbourliness. Collecting secret military information about the host countries was also part of the *maqosa's* duties. Even in the foreign country, the *Maqosa* were accorded respect and protection and were identified by the copper insignia they wore around their necks. They were said to bear the emblem of the ruling clan and the seal of the King. The *Maqosa and Lihloela* helped each other in the assessment of the host country's military and political situations (Ndovorwi, 1977:12- 13).

Children in Lesotho were introduced to traditional cultural values and general knowledge of the world they lived in through oral literature, folklore and various ceremonies and rituals. In this regard women played a vital and leading role as unlike men they spent more time with children. Literature such as *lils'oimo* (folk tales), *lipale* (stories), *lilotho* (riddles) and *maele* (proverbs) was highly imaginative and educational. Other interpersonal channels included performance modes which even today are still popular in the rural areas. These modes are *mohobelo* (dance for men), *mokhibo* (dance for women), *pina-tsa-mokopu* (girls' songs) and *lifela* (form of poetry by men), (Mda 199e:64).

7.13 Traditional media's advantages

Traditional systems of communication are trusted and the majority of the people seem to believe in what comes out of them and usually use them and supplement them with whatever additional information may filter through opinion leaders about events elsewhere (Wilson,

1987). Other advantages of the use of, in particular, folk media (folk theatre, puppetry, storytelling, folk dances, ballads and mime) have been identified as follows:

- they are part of the rural environment and hence credible sources of information for ruralites;
- as live media they command the audience;
- they can generate grassroots participation and a dialogue between the performers and the audience;
- some folk media formats are flexible and lend themselves to the incorporation of development-oriented messages;
- they are available locally and are relatively inexpensive compared with mass media;
- they do not need expatriate expertise to operate (Melkote, 1991:219-223; Jayaweera. 1987: 89-90).

The use of either mass media or traditional media needs to be carefully analysed to establish, among other things, the purpose for which they are being used. This is of vital importance given that media can be used for liberation purposes or for reinforcing undemocratic social structures. Despite their many advantages, traditional media or some forms of them are can be supportive to the status quo and thus perpetuate existing social inequalities. Quoting a 1987 report of a study by the World Association for Christian Communication on how efficient culture-based forms of communication were for helping to realize development goals, Jayaweera (1987:90) observes that:

- traditional forms of communication did not by themselves promote the goals of development; and that
- left to themselves they tended to strengthen and perpetuate long entrenched power structures that were iniquitous and counter developmental.

There is therefore a need for more and better research in the general uses of indigenous communication system for development purposes. Not only has the study of indigenous communication systems largely been neglected in the past, but the evolution of communication systems which manifest interaction between channels and the mass media has also been overlooked. Very little is known about the information environment of the rural poor in Third World nations (Wang & Dissanayake, 1984; Wilson, 1987: 101). Effective communication

planning and policies would give traditional media the recognition they deserve and establish through research how they can effectively be used alongside modern mass media to enhance the communication process and thereby promote social development (see Ziegler & Asante, 1992; Boafo, 1985; Ochola 1983, Wang & Dissanayake. 1985; Mativo, 1989).

In the case of Lesotho research into how traditional media can be effectively utilized for development purposes would be very much appropriate given that the country's recently formulated media policy recognises the need to use both types of media for development purposes and emphasizes media's role in cultural development (see Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:5). As traditional forms of communication are embedded in culture, cultural development can only mean their nurturing. Radio Lesotho already incorporates some of the interpersonal modes of communication prevalent in the rural areas into their programmes. These include *pina-tsa-mokopu*, *lilotho*, *lithothokiso* and *lits'omo*. In an interview with this writer, the Director of Radio Lesotho, Molahlehi Letlotlo, said an a national station Radio Lesotho had a duty to project the nation's cultural identity. "We have specifically set up a culture and education unit within the programmes's section as part of our efforts to promote and popularize our culture both educationally and entertainment wise." This researcher established, however, that some of these modes of communication are not necessarily being utilized for development purposes even though they could be. For instance, *lits'omo* (folk tales) and *Lipale* (stories) could be used to instill in children the culture of caring for their environment and yet they seem to be dominated by scaring stories of animals devouring people or other animals alive. As culture is dynamic these forms of communication need to be flexible enough to be adapted to the changing world. This could make them more relevant and socially rewarding.

The *pitso*, for example, may still be the most effective mode of imparting useful information especially in the rural areas. In a national survey in which 1,973 respondents (comprising nurses and village health workers) were asked as to what they found to be the most effective way of informing people about health activities, the *pitso* came first. 31 percent of the nurses felt that the *pitso* was the most effective because many people attended it. The use of the radio came second with 27 percent. 51 percent of the village health workers also felt that the *pitso* was the most effective way of communicating with people. They reasoned out that since the *pitso* is

called by chiefs high attendance was always guaranteed because in rural areas people are not inclined to disobey chiefs (Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, 1987:67-68).

7.14 Summary

In sum, this chapter has discussed rural reporting by LENA. In the process it has established that the opening of LENA offices in the districts has not, as was intended, brought ruralites into the mainstream communication process in any meaningful way. The main problem is that it is working within hierarchical, non-participatory political and development structures which hinder democratic communication. Once the newly formulated media policy is implemented in full force the country's media landscape might change for the better as more and more people become part of the mainstream communication process. The problem with Lesotho and many other developing countries is that the government's communication approach seems to substitute modern mass media for traditional media instead of using both to complement each other. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses and what is required is to capitalize on the strengths of both. The fact that many reporters (the majority of whom have not gone beyond the 'o' level) are now subjected to training of only up to a month's duration, suggests that the government may not be taking seriously the social responsibility of journalists. As suggested by Nwosu (1988) effective rural reporting requires response reporters to be familiar with the rural environment as well as being properly trained to see and report news from the perspective of the ruralites. All these requisites seem to be lacking on the part of the news agency. Addressing these serious shortcomings is essential if any meaningful headway is to be made. These together with the restructuring and democratization of the media systems, could go a long way towards enhancing LENA's role in development communication. It is important to stress that LENA's effectiveness must be seen in the context of the need for major structural changes in the social and power structures to facilitate conditions of self-management and participation in decision-making by all those affected (see, for example, Todaro, 1994:16; Nair & White, 1994:346-347; Hope, 1983: 456; Servaes, 1989:49-50).

The next chapter is on LENA, women and development.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8. THE LESOTHO NEWS AGENCY (LENA), WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Introduction.

Women in Lesotho are the major players in farming in the rural small holdings which provide subsistence to the majority of the population. It is estimated that 72 percent of small enterprises are female owned and that 45 percent of employees in manufacturing enterprises are women. Despite this major role which women are playing in the economic life of the country, they continue to suffer gender discrimination. The definition of gender used here is that of a socially defined allocation of tasks in society between man and women (Gender and Development Report, 1997:6). This chapter argues that women are central to the development process in Lesotho and that their full participation in decision-making at both local and national levels can only expedite and enhance the development process. Towards this end effective promotion of gender equality is a prerequisite.

8.2 Background information

In the late 1970s projects were introduced with a view to integrate women into productive activities of development. Many women were involved in food -aid rural infrastructure building projects such as roads construction and soil conservation activities. These projects were labour intensive and time consuming but with marginal success as they required women to create time within their already overloaded household activities in order to participate in them. Payment was usually in kind, such as food (Gender and Development Report, 1997:6).

By the 1980s it became clear that women in development strategies had not meaningfully alleviated poverty among women. The problem was identified as fewer opportunities of women compared with men to participate fully in the development process. Women's lack of access to credit facilities, for example, was mentioned as one of the major obstacles preventing women from effectively establishing themselves as entrepreneurs. Institutions such as the Basotho Enterprise Development Corporation (BEDCO), Business Advisory and Promotion Service (BAPS) and some financial institutions began to offer either training and or loans to women entrepreneurs. These measures, however, continue to be undermined by cultural traditions and laws which discriminate women (Gender and Development Report, 1997:7).

The current approach lays emphasis on formulation of a national policy on gender and development concentrating not on women alone but on relations between men and women on the understanding that both contribute to development. Thus the approach recognises that women's lives and choices cannot be understood in isolation from their relations to men. The focus is therefore on relationships, roles and responsibilities between men and women. The approach seeks to eliminate structural inequalities between men and women to ensure women's equal participation in development (Gender and Development Report. 1997:6-8).

8.3 Gender disparities

Seventy percent of farm households are headed by women. Men comprise the majority of the 40 percent migrant labour force employed in South Africa. Women are not only household heads and managers but are also actively engaged in the public sphere in industries, agriculture, trade and education among others. Despite the fact that women form the bulk of the civil service, manufacturing and service sector, they tend to be concentrated at lower levels where their impact on decision making tends to be low (Gender and Development Report, 1997:9). To underscore this point posters issued by the Lesotho Department of Information (1997) show that in the national assembly consisting of 80 members only 3 members are women while in the senate consisting of 33 members 11 are women. The Lesotho cabinet has only one woman minister. This clearly shows a serious under-representation of women in the important decision-making structures of the country.

Studies show that 53 percent of the total households in the country are headed by women. The female headed households are amongst the poorest in Lesotho. On about every indicator they were poorer than male headed households. They are less likely to afford their children's school fees spending about \$31 (US) per month per child per year as opposed to \$40 (US) per month per child per year in male headed households; They are less likely to be able to afford health care, spending only about \$3 (US) per year on health as opposed to about \$5 (US) per person per year in male headed households; and they are less likely to have as many possessions with an average of about \$179 (US) worth of selected items as opposed to about \$333 (US) in male

headed households (Gender and Development Report, 1997:83; Ministry of Planning, 1996:152).

Women are in an advantageous position in as far as their educational qualifications are concerned. They have not only one of the highest female literacy rates for developing countries, but are also more educated than their men folk. See the statistics below:

Educational Data

1. Enrolment in Primary School. Grades 1-7 by Sex as at March 1996

	Male	Female	Total
Total	178481	196147	374628

2. Enrolment in Secondary Education by Sex as at March 1996

	Male	Female	Total
Total	27742	39712	67454

3. Adult Literacy Rate in 1986

Female	54%
Male	34%

Source: Population Division of the Ministry of Planning, Maseru, Lesotho.

As the foregoing statistics show gender bias does not always favour males over females. Basotho boys, for example, get less primary schooling than girls. Lower school enrolments for boys is found in all income groups, regions and ecological zones. The greatest disparity is found in herding-oriented mountain zones where nearly 30 percent more girls than boys attend school. It is a common rural practice to send young boys (three to five) with older brothers to tend family livestock (Pathway out of Poverty Report, 1996:12). The enrolment for girls is 76 percent while that of boys is 64 percent. At the point of entry, 22 percent of the pupils are under age and 44 percent are over age, leaving 34 percent who enter school at the recommended age of six. Of those who are out of school, 65 percent are boys and 35 percent are girls. The 104,127 school age children who are out of school include three major categories:

- children who have to wait until they are old enough to walk long distances five days a week because they live in villages far from any school;

- children whose families are poor and who cannot afford the cost of sending them to school; and
- the large number of boys who remain at home to take care of animals as herdboys while their age-mates start at school (Government of Lesotho/UNICEF Report, 1996:94).

Despite the fact that women are more educated and are the majority of the domestic labour force, several constraints have affected their fuller participation in the development process. The most cited is the legal position of women. Under customary law all women are perpetual minors whose guardianship is passed on from father to husband or to any male relative. Most women are married in community of property (as against for example, out of community of property or an antenuptial contract which specifically excludes marital power) and therefore are perpetual minors. This means that they cannot engage in any contractual obligations or make decisions without the consent of a male guardian. This limits their access to credit, their right to decide on the spacing of their families, the right to own as well as inherit property, inter alia (Gender and Development Report. 1997: 10).

Culture and tradition have also not made things easier for those seeking gender equality. Sesotho culture is based on a patriarchal ideology whereby one's identity traced through one's paternal lineage and descent. Because of this culture a number of customs and practices have evolved which give men more decision-making powers and the position of the heads of households. Some aspects of this culture have been incorporated into customary law which places women under the perpetual custody and protection of men. The importance of men in the family is even reflected in, for example, mourning rituals. More importance is attached to the death of a husband / a man in the family. It is assumed that the family has been decapitated and one way of showing one's respect for such a person is that husbands or sons are mourned for a period of up to one year. Women have to wear black mourning dress from head to toe and have to be in their homes before sunset, etc. (Gender and Development Report, 1997:12).

The chieftaincy institution has governed and united the Basotho as a nation for a long time. Its principle of succession is the same as that of the inheritance of laws in Lesotho. The heir is the oldest male in the family or any other male relative as decided by the family. It is only men who are born to be chiefs in their own right. Women who comprise the majority of sub-chiefs hold

such positions only when they are either standing in for a husband who is working elsewhere or has been suspended for disciplinary actions, or a son who is not yet of age to assume his position. Because this institution is closely linked to patrilineal descent it is difficult for women, for example, daughters to become chiefs by birth because the assumption is that they would marry and move to their husbands' families and their children would not be able to inherit their chieftaincy because they would belong to another family or lineage (Gender and Development Report, 1997:13).

8.4 International Conventions

Lesotho has signed a number of International Conventions which strive to achieve gender equality. These include the 1952 United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of women which recognises the right of women to engage in political activity on the same basis as men. The convention was signed in 1974. Of the 23 women candidates who stood for the 1993 national elections only 3 were elected into parliament in spite of the fact that women outnumber men. The government's recognition that the enhanced legal status of women was the key for the future development of Lesotho led to its commitment to undertake the following:

- strengthening government machinery so that it can effectively design and implement various activities for the advancement of women and their integration into the main stream of economic development;
- shifting of emphasis away from "women only" projects since this tends to perpetuate the subordinate status of women in the household;
- development of a comprehensive national policy on women and development based on the ratification, without any reservation of the UN Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and
- evaluation of all policies for their impacts on women (Ministry of Planning 1992:86).

The government has, however, has not fully honoured its commitment. For instance, attempts by women's associations to bring pressure to bear on the on the government to ratify CEDAW culminated in its ratification in 1995 but with a reservation to article 2 (1) (Gender and Development Report, 1997:15). As Pholo (1994:3) states, the government lacks the political will to go all the way to eliminate discrimination against women. "It has for years. continued to

manipulate and use tradition, culture and religion as a ground for denying women the enjoyment of their basic human rights." Such reservations are indicative of the Government's seemingly half-hearted attempts to promote gender equality. In the Lesotho Constitution, for example, under section 18 (1) is on **freedom from discrimination** and yet in sub section 4 (a, b, and c) allowance is made in respect of the application of customary law (which favours men) as regards, for example, adoption, marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property on death.

Other previous measures have entailed the establishment of a Bureau of Women's Affairs in 1979 whose aim was to integrate women into development. It was created to conceptualise women's programmes in an integrated manner within the sector of development and at the same time develop effective methods, policies and mechanisms for affirmative action and to ensure an integrated approach. It was also mandated to coordinate women's organisations, suggestions and recommendations from women to be integrated into socioeconomic development and the National Development Plans. The Bureau, however, encountered a number of problems. Notable amongst these were:

- Lack of policy directive to incorporate the Bureau into national planning structures: and
- lack of capacity to collect and analyse data on women and to formulate and evaluate projects (Gender and Development Report, 1997:15).

8.5 Non-Governmental Organisations

Trade Unions have embarked on a number of measures to ensure gender sensitivity in employment procedures in accordance with the International Labour Organisation's conventions. These measures have ensured, among others, the principle of equal pay for equal work, maternity leave and safety for night work. Non-Governmental Organisations like the Lesotho Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), the Women's Research Collective and Women and Law in Southern Africa have been engaged in gender sensitization programmes to make men and women aware of the need for equal opportunities and participation in development (Gender and Development Report. 1997:17).

The Lesotho Federation of Women Lawyers has been the most active of the women organisations in terms of raising social awareness of issues revolving around discrimination against women through, notably, workshops, seminars and campaigns in the media. For example, on 23 March, 1994 the Federation held a workshop for Lesotho parliamentarians to sensitize them on gender issues as well as to urge them to pass a law illegalizing all forms of discrimination against women. In 1997 the Federation has also been holding workshops throughout the country to urge women to stand as candidates in the general elections scheduled for 1998. In one of these workshops held in Butha-Buthe, participants were told "we need your numbers in parliament to pass laws illegalizing any form of 'discrimination against women". The slow pace at which progress is being made towards ensuring the full participation of women in socio-political activities slows down the pace of development. As Suliman (1990:153) notes, these deprived women hold the riches of the future in their hands.

8.6 The Lesotho Highlands Water Revenue Fund

As indicated in Chapter Three Lesotho Government has established a fund to finance community-based development projects. The Fund is part of the royalties paid to Lesotho by the Republic of South Africa for the sale of water from the Lesotho Highlands Water scheme. Officially the aim of the Development Fund is to give local communities a chance to come together to prioritize their local projects for funding purposes. In practice, though, the operation of the Fund is riddled with serious problems and irregularities These include:

- approval of projects proposed by Members of Parliament on a constituency basis;
- limited community participation in project identification;
- only physical infrastructure projects supported, mainly, roads, dams and footbridges;
- supervision is often weak, sustainability is uncertain; and
- accountability is questionable (Rapolaki. 1997:4).

The government has initiated restructuring of the management of the Fund and revision of the regulations governing the Fund. A newly enlarged management structure to include representatives from non-governmental organizations and private business organizations is to be introduced during 1997/98. The operations of the Fund will continue to focus on community based development projects initiated through a participatory "bottom up" planning process.

Preparations are underway to train Village Development Councils (VDCs) in community needs assessment and privatization of those needs. Since the project came into operation about two years ago 238 projects have been approved. A total of 1070 km of road has been constructed in the whole country. 210 dams have been built, 60 footbridges, 2 bridges, 2 clinics and a market have been constructed. In addition, 20 dongas have been rehabilitated, 20 soil conservation projects undertaken and 32328 trees have been planted in various constituencies within the country (Molapo, 1996: 1).

From April 1998 the government is to introduce a revised fund and about \$ 16 million a year will be set aside for the Fund for the next four years (Ketso 1997:14). The Fund could go a long way towards community empowerment. As indicated the majority of the poor are in rural areas where many households are headed by women. Women and children are the society's most vulnerable groups. Land is an important asset for both agricultural growth and social safety net. Secure land rights give farmers a social safety net. Since as high as 49 percent of the male labour force is employed in South Africa, agriculture is left entirely in the hands of women. Although the Land Act allows women to hold leases, their continued minority status under customary law hinders their ability to acquire use rights from their chiefs in their own names (Gender and Development Report, 1997:21). Thus women are farmers and managers of a resource they do not own.

The Fund could also be used not only to facilitate women's participation in decision-making in agricultural matters but also to increase their opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life. Measures could include, for example, funding of workshops and creating of community forums where issues ranging from health to education as well as income generating, projects could be discussed. The Introduction of local government in the course of next year coupled with the proposed "bottom-up" planning process by the VDCs could go along way towards empowering women and facilitating their climb up the ladder of decision-making structures. VDCs' somewhat marginal success is attributed to lack of real powers and the difficult social environment in which they operate. They are formerly vested with wide-ranging powers and responsibilities. For instance, VDCs are required to:

- be responsible in consultation with the government for the planning, formulation, implementation and maintenance of development activities and social services in the area of their jurisdiction;
- represent and lead the local community in its efforts to identify village development needs;
- raise funds for its local development purposes:
- stimulate local participation in development activities: and
- make government aware of local development priorities through the District Development Council (Rugege, 1990:15 1).

Some writers, Michael Sefali (1989:53) amongst them, regard VDCs as the genuine organs of popular power mobilization for development. "Through these representative bodies, communities at local level are given greater control over the identification of development needs, allocation of resources and disbursement of development funds." The reality on the ground, however, suggests otherwise. There is, for example, a tug of war over power between VDCs and chiefs and in many cases chiefs have tended to undermine the development efforts initiated by councillors. Some chiefs, for example, continue to allocate land without recourse to land committees because of the monetary gain they derive from such misuse of their position. In some cases land has been allocated by a chief to more than one person (Rugege, 1990: 150). The Government too tends to undermine these councils by 'consulting' them on issues it has already taken decisions on their behalf (Foundations of Education with Production Report, 1989).

The decentralization efforts through appointment of District Co-ordinators (now called District Secretaries) and elections for Development Councils at district, ward and village levels are generally regarded as having failed to achieve the expected results. Political top-down manipulation of rural people was the major motive rather than genuine decentralization which promoted and facilitated politically indiscriminated popular participation of the communities. The poor were inevitable the victims of this manipulation which resulted in, among other things, election of incompetent candidates into development councils as well as misunderstandings between elected members and ex-officio members (largely traditional leaders). The situation was further compounded by lack of administrative and inter-ministerial rural development

oriented approach in planning and implementation both at central and district levels (Phororo, 1994:14).

The implementation of rural development programmes is also constrained by in-built limitations which makes it difficult for the rural poor at the grassroots level to have an effective working relationship with administrative bureaucracies. Over the years, broad-based institution building necessary for decentralized activities has often been substituted by a narrow focus on strengthening of public sector management. Although strengthening of public sector bodies are but one part of the overall institutions building, many current policy strategies for institution building concentrate on public service agencies, particularly at the central level. For example, there is virtually, no planning capability at district level to facilitate design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of rural programmes (Phororo. 1994:14).

In an interview with a focus group of VDCs, this researcher was told by the group that they endure many frustrating experiences stemming from chiefs' resistance to their powers and functions. During interviews in 1990 in Leribe, Mafeteng and Roma it was found that Development Councils had not started any new development schemes since they were constituted in 1986. They had not received money from any sources and had not raised any from the community. Various people interviewed expressed lack of enthusiasm. They complained of the dominance of chiefs. Others dismissed the councils as useless structures dominated by chiefs and their cronies (Rugege. 1990:155).

8.7 Chieftaincy

The proposed new system of local government in Lesotho accommodates chiefs as ex-officio members in all levels of governance on the ground that traditional authorities offer 'cultural stability and continuity'. "The new local government system will ensure that depending on the size of the local authority, between two to four councillors will be non-elected, ex-officio gazetted chiefs" (Ministry of Local Government, 1996:23). The dual functions that the chieftaincy serves on behalf of the central state has been suggested as the reason for retention of chiefs in structures of governance. On the one hand there is the practical function of maintaining law and order and ensuring the performance of public services by the rural Population and on the other an ideological function whereby the chieftaincy depicted as the authentic 'traditional' authority entitled to obedience on the part of the people (Rugege. 1990:170).

During colonial rule chiefs became accountable to their new masters rather than to the people for their actions. That state of affairs continued after independence. Today, chiefs are accountable to whoever pays their salary whatever the nature of the regime in power. It is therefore important to place the institution in the context of modern ideas of government and how it assists or hinders political as well as socio-economic development (Rugege, 1990:156-157). The question is are chiefs really indispensable particularly given that their utility and direction is determined by the government of the day? In a democratic state like Lesotho which is 'committed' to democratic governance why are people's views not sought as to what should become the chieftaincy institution given that the conditions which gave rise to it seem to no longer exist?

Some political scientists, Makoa (1990:179) amongst them argue chieftainship can be dispensed with as its political functions are being performed either by politicians or secular functionaries at different levels of society. According to Makoa the auxiliary functions of the chiefs, on the other hand can easily be performed by the village development committees. This would be cheaper for the government to maintain since the incumbents receive no salaries for their services. The government spends millions of rands on the chiefs' and their staff's salaries annually. This money could be used for more pressing needs of the poor. As chiefs' Judicial functions "have been taken over by the magistrates, it would seem that the restructuring of the system of government in Lesotho would necessarily have to consider the abolition of the chieftainship".

8.8 Decentralization

Decentralizing political, fiscal and administrative authority is the key to reducing the cost of and hence expanding the delivery of infrastructure, utilities and social services (see Appendix III). At the heart of rural development, for example, is a core of rather simple, small investment projects, such as the construction of rural roads and bridges, the digging of wells, the development of small-scale irrigation and the building and repair of schools. To be effective, decentralization must proceed along all three paths: political, fiscal and administrative and this must take place alongside strengthening of institutional capacity (Pathway out of Poverty, Report. 1996:44-45).

8.9 Media's role

The media have a crucial role to play in, most importantly, raising public awareness and promoting understanding of the link between gender equality and development. LENA in particular has an added responsibility and needs to be singled out in view of the fact that it is the only news organisation that has offices in all the ten districts of the country. Through their reporters the agency needs to talk to women in their localities, diagnose their problems and report about them from their (women's) perspective as well. Their news reports need to capture and reflect the social environment in which the majority of women and children live which is characterized, notably, by endemic poverty. For instance, more than sixty percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The majority of children in Lesotho are brought up in unhealthy environmental health conditions. In poor urban areas children live in unplanned and congested settlements with poor social and physical infrastructure and unhealthy sanitation conditions. Access to safe drinking water is 56 percent and access to safe means of excreta disposal is 35 percent in rural areas and 38 percent in the urban areas (Ministry of Planning/UNICEF 1996:105-116). LENA's effective coverage of this problem which is central to the development process is critical more so as the government has made poverty reduction its main development objective (Ministry of Planning, 1997:70).

For the majority of households living below the poverty line in rural areas, the availability of adequate and balanced food throughout the year is a rarity. At the best of times, in only 17 of the 60 census areas into which Lesotho is divided, do more than 25 percent of the population produce enough food to feed their households. Leaving aside the effects of the drought which had persisted since 1991, there has been a long-term decline in per capita food output over the past few decades which is unlikely to be reversed. This is attributed to severe environmental degradation, poor and declining soil fertility, growing population pressures and inappropriate and ineffective agricultural policies and extension services (Ministry of Planning/UNICEF 1996:120).

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, there is not much difference between stories emanating from Maseru (capital) and the districts in terms of content. Both reflect a similar approach to news gathering which focuses mainly on government officials and other elite groups. LENA did try to target vulnerable groups of the society in the early 1990's through a

quarterly publication concentrating on women and children. As indicated in Chapter Six, the publication was stopped at the instruction of the then Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in 1995 on the ground that a news agency does not engage in publications. Since then there has not been any attempt to revive feature writing on women's issues. With the government in the process of formulating a national policy on gender and development there is a need for the agency and media in general to familiarize themselves with the issues involved and be part of groups, institutions and people promoting social awareness and action to bring about gender equality.

The next chapter is on findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER NINE

9. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction.

The purpose of this study has been to discuss the role of the news agency in development (support) communication using the Lesotho News Agency (LENA) as a case study. The study is cognisant of the fact that media take colouration of the environment in which they operate. With this consideration in mind LENA has been examined and discussed in relation to the Lesotho's socio-political climate and the government's strategies to advance the process of development. Participation is central to the new approaches to development with more emphasis put on communities' participation at the grassroots level in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the projects intended to improve their social well-being. In this connection the Lesotho Government seems to be according high priority to effective participation of the people in development strategies and programmes. Towards this end institutional reforms have been initiated. These include, notably, the National Planning Board which comprises people from different sectors of the society and the (proposed) decentralization of planning through local government structures (see Ministry of Planning, 1997:82). Also see Appendix III regarding the proposed new structure Local Government (p.272).

LFNA's role has been discussed in the context of the nature and relevance of the information it disseminates in terms of the extent to which it (information) empowers citizens or reinforces the status quo. This has taken the form of, for example, establishing to what extent information by the agency reflects the needs, problems and aspirations of the people at large. The constraints within which the agency operates, notably, the communication environment and the centralized media system have been analysed to determine how and to what extent they affect the effectiveness of the agency and democratic communication in general. Given below are a summary, findings and recommendations of this study.

9.2 Civil service environment

As indicated in Chapter Six the civil service environment is non-conducive to the professional conduct expected of journalists. Lack of recognition of civil servants reporters as professionals in their own right is a demotivating factor on the part of those who believe and regard themselves as members of a profession. It is often emphasized that civil servants journalists are restrained from engaging in the kind of reporting that might be perceived to be critical of the government of the day and therefore cannot report 'objectively' on issues involving those in power. This coupled with self-censorship on the part of reporters has probably reinforced this perception. The question is whether it is fair to LENA's performance or any other media organisation for that matter on the basis of whether it criticizes the government of the day or not? Is good journalism mainly about criticizing the government of the day? What about, for example stories that inform the Public about the need to protect their environment, the need to have babies immunized, the need to take charge of their lives by working together to improve the quality of their lives rather than expecting the government to do it for them.

There is no question that ownership and/or control have a strong influence on what is reported or not reported. The bottom line is he who pays the piper also calls the tune. National news agencies, including government media, have a credibility problem perhaps mainly because of the way in which they were used in the past by dictatorial regimes to legitimise the status quo. Albert Hester (1987:63) reminds us that dictatorial regimes are inclined to turn the energies of the press to maintain themselves in power. The goals of national development become of little importance where the preservation of their power is at stake. "If the press is integral to government institutions, it can be more easily perverted to such efforts."

LENA was established during military rule in 1986 and there are no indications that it is being treated differently from the way other government media are being treated despite its unique position as the country's main news collector and disseminator both nationally and internationally. LENA reporters are governed by the same rules and regulations that govern other civil servants. This situation puts them at a disadvantage compared to journalists who are not civil servants. They are, for instance, in accordance with Public Service Act (I 995:149) not expected to 'engage in conduct that brings the public service into discredit, disrepute or contempt or brings the authorities of government or any Minister of Government into discredit, disrepute or contempt'. What chance therefore do LENA reporters or those of other government media for that matter leave to, for example, expose corruption on the part of government as part of media's responsibility to make those who govern accountable to those they govern"

We have learnt in Chapter Six that national news agencies have the stigma of not being credible sources of information and that they are, by and large, viewed as propaganda arms of the government

of the day (see Ansah, 1986:43). Since credibility is central to the news phenomenon LENA needs to operate outside the environment in which it is perceived to be a tool of whoever is in power. As the only news organisation with a network extending to all the districts of the country LENA's credibility cannot be overemphasized. This is important not only for existing and potential subscribers but most importantly for the public at large. The public needs accurate and truthful information to make informed judgements.

One of the things good about democracy is that it allows for diverse ownership patterns of media (state media, church media, community media, private/commercial and so on). Other things being equal, this creates a competitive environment in which those media which suppress certain news/information (government media for example) run the risk of being outdone by other media with less restrictions.

What is important is for society to map out its vision of the kind of media system it wants to serve its interests and define the principles and values that should underpin such a system. Thus the efficacy and effectiveness of a news agency or any other media for that matter would be judged against the role it is expected to play in society. In the case of Lesotho, media's role is clearly spelt out in the newly formulated media policy document (see Introduction). What is now

needed is for the government to live up to responsibility of creating an enabling social environment media can play a pivotal role in empowering citizens and entrenching democracy.

Two of the critical elements that should comprise the media system in Lesotho have been identified as developmental media and community media (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:11). These two elements are of crucial importance in that they have a great potential to redress the presently centralised media system which pays scant attention to events and affairs in rural areas. Developmental media are needed especially for the rural and marginalised sectors of the society while community media serve as communication facilities through which communities can talk for and about themselves. The question is how should these media be funded given the scarcity of resources (financial) particularly in the rural areas? Should the development of such media infrastructure be left in the hands of the government?

In the case of Lesotho which has a history of political instability it is important to ensure that the government's role is restricted to creating an enabling environment in which the funding of such media will be done by an independent body in which the main stakeholders are represented. The source of funding could be in the form of a commitment by the government to, for example, set aside one percent or whatever appropriate percentage of sales tax for the purpose. As almost everyone directly or indirectly pays sales tax people would rightly feel that the media are theirs and therefore have the right to use them as they see fit. Thus they would be owning and controlling them. The democratic way of doing it, however, would be to ask the public through a survey, for example, how they would want such media to be funded.

The Media Policy document recognizes the unique and important role of the news agency as the main collector and disseminator of news about Lesotho both nationally and internationally and views its editorial and operational independence as vital to enabling it perform its public functions effectively. To ensure this independence the document suggests that LENA be governed by a board independent of government. "The governing board should be appointed for a fixed term, preferably after public hearings and should have the powers to appoint the directors of the news agency. (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:14). Emphasis on editorial and operational independence, though, must not overshadow the central issue of ensuring that the agency is transformed from being a predominantly urban and peri-urban news medium to a more village based news medium. According to the 1996 Lesotho Population Data Sheet (issued by

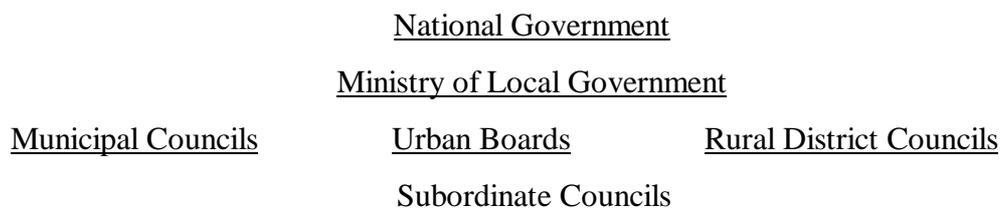
the population division of the Ministry of Planning) the percentage of the population living in urban areas as of 1996 was 19.4. The rest, constituting a large majority, live in rural areas and the agency must be seen to be there as development takes place where people live.

Two factors favour the transformation of LENA into a more people-oriented news agency:

- the newly formulated media policy which favours autonomy for the agency and a range of media offerings that are diverse in purpose, funding, ownership and scope; and
- decentralisation through local government to be implemented in 1998.

What is important is for the government to implement the central tenets of the country's media policy as this would also enhance the policy of development through decentralisation. As far as LENA is concerned it should be provided with transport adequate enough to enable it operate in the villages on a more regular basis. As media infrastructure is expanded LENA needs to play a more pivotal role using its news gathering network as the nucleus of news media operations. It is so proposed that LENA gears itself up to operate within local Government structures (shown below):

Schematic Structure of the proposed Local Government



With the proposed introduction of local government system it seems imperative that the agency's structures extend to /link up with the locally based democratically elected structures such as the Village Development Councils (VDCs). This, however, needs to be done in the context of an integrated and well-coordinated approach which would entail, for example, collaboration and coordination with other development communicators. Currently even development communicators from line ministries operate as though they do not belong to the same body (government). Their approach to communication is lacks coordination and it is not cost effective as some programmes are a duplication of others. LENA reports need to be informed by

and reflect social environment in which development is taking place. As we have seen in the examples of stories (see Chapter Six) there is no discernible difference between stories written in Maseru and those written in the districts save for datelines and yet the social conditions prevailing in Maseru are different from those in the districts and rural areas.

9.3 Centralized media system

As LENA uses channels to communicate it is vital that such channels be accessible. Although print media in Lesotho is predominantly private its poor circulation figures and urban orientation make them inaccessible for the majority of the people. Radio enjoys a reasonably high percentage of listenership but just like the print media it is a bit more urban oriented and tends to address issues and problems from the perspectives of the elite/urban based sources with very little participation by recipients. The proposed incorporation of the national radio station and opening up of airwaves to private individuals/companies/institutions is a good thing for democracy as it is likely to bring in more perspectives into the communication environment. What is more important, however, is ensuring that in the process of this opening up, disadvantaged sections of the society are also empowered to talk for and about themselves. In this regard, through research, the government needs to establish the best strategies to bring all sections of the society into mainstream communication process using both modern media and traditional modes of communication.

Community radio stations have been suggested as one of the effective ways in which media system can be brought closer to the people to enable them talk about and for themselves. This, however, should be in addition to and not substitute or be an alternative to other mechanisms such as community newsletters, traditional discussion forums such as the *khotla*, the *pitso* and others. In any event the economic viability of community radio stations in the generally poor rural areas is questionable. People need to rely more on projects they can sustain. There is a need for an enabling environment in which communities in the villages can also use their forums to articulate their needs and aspirations. Mass media can also be taken to the people in the form of reporters going to villages to do tape and or video recordings of discussions by villages on topics impacting on their lives.

The government recognises that population management is critical to the attainment of medium and long term national development goals. As part of its population policy strategies some

reporters in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have been trained with the assistance of UNFPA (and others are still undergoing training) to do radio programmes aimed at conscientizing the public about population issues as they affect development. The idea is for these reporters to go to, mainly villages, to various target groups including women and youth to record their discussions/debates on population and development issues. The resource person is used to facilitate the debate/discussions and makes his/her input but does not dictate what conclusions the audience should reach. The tapes and or videos are then played on the national radio station and/or television. These tapes and videos can constitute a very important information base for, in particular, policy makers. LENA needs to cover these occasions and tell the nation and the world what ordinary people say about issues impacting on their lives. After all as LENA's stories are dominated by government officials this offers them an opportunity to balance up with people-oriented stories.

Now that Lesotho's media policy has been formulated and calls for, among other things, mechanisms to be put in place for empowering disadvantaged communities (see Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:9) what is needed is not a unilateral action on the part of government to effect this, but an inclusive process involving the intended beneficiaries. There is a need, therefore, for research aimed at establishing the informational needs of these communities. The government must avoid assuming that it knows what kind of information people need. They must be involved in the identification of their informational and other needs as well as in the strategies proposed to address those needs. This interaction is essential as participation is central to the new approaches to development.

9.4 Training

The media have a duty to disseminate information that enables people to make informed decisions and choices. They have a responsibility to empower citizens and entrench democracy and thereby contribute to the process of social and economic development (Lesotho Media Policy, 1997:5). These socio-political and educational roles can clearly be effectively played by people who are, at least, fairly grounded in the areas in which they write about. Journalists therefore ought not to forget that they are both educators and reporters. The educational task is especially, important where many people lack basic education (Hester, 1987:66). The need for journalists to have a sound general education background cannot be overemphasized. As of June 1997 LENA had only three graduates and with the exception of one or two the rest had

G.C.E. passes. How can we then expect people of this calibre to write well-researched informative stories that explain and contextualize events?

The level of recruitment seems to be with the agency's mandate and needs to be raised to attract more qualified personnel. The recruitment is further compounded by the agency's lack of a well coordinated training programme that would specifically address its training needs. The part-time Mass Communication Diplorna course offered by the National University of Lesotho is a step forward but other options need to be pursued alongside this one. One of these options is on-the job training and it is an option that is being used successfully by many other media houses. Its main advantage is that it simultaneously combines theory and practice, and ensures constant progress monitoring. Farayi Munyuki (1997:5), writes that on-the job training facilities play a vital part in the training of young reporters in the first two and half years and "there is an increasing stress being placed by most news agencies on in-house training arrangements". This approach coupled with more recruits with a university or technikon education background would be more effective in raising the standard of news writing and thereby disseminating more useful information.

9.5 News content

News content is one area where a lot needs to be done to improve quality and relevance of what is disseminated. Too many stories, for example, reflect a top-down approach dissemination of information from sources to recipients who are invariably portrayed as passive entities. Most stories are not researched at all and therefore lack background material/information. 'This can be partly ascribed to the dominant approach of treating news, most of which is development related, as spot events rather than as a process. News reports on seminars/conferences / workshops seem to focus on what is said by whoever opens or closes the occasion. The discussions and interventions by participants are rarely if ever reported. The resolutions resulting from participants' deliberations are also rarely if ever reported and yet resolutions, for instance, constitute a very important part of these occasions. The pattern seems to be to cover official openings and closures of these occasions and by and large ignore deliberations.

The key to the rectification of the situation seems to lie in the employment of the right people in (terms of training) at the middle and top management because many reporters have a highly inadequate training and therefore still need a lot of guidance. Editors are the key people in

deciding whether a story meets acceptable professional standards or not. But in addition to that they need to show direction to reporters in terms of how events should be covered. If they are not well-groomed for the job they are doing then the quality of stories is bound to leave much to be desired. The editors capabilities seem to need a lot of revamping. Too many stories are transmitted to clients poorly edited and quite lean on content. This suggests an absence of mechanisms to monitor the quality of stories on a regular basis. In this regard it is recommended that part of the time used for daily editorial meetings should be used to go through a sample of stories transmitted the previous day as part of regular monitoring of quality and content. Promoting a positive image of the organisation is very important particularly for an organisation that strives to Increase its clientele.

If the key features of the Lesotho Media Policy document are implemented by the Government, LENA will be a corporation in the near future. As a corporation it will be expected to operate much more efficiently and effectively and will also be expected to intensify efforts to bring in more revenue by attracting more subscribers. One of the things it needs to address urgently is operational system in terms of having a strategy to ensure that news reports also cover specifically targeted areas on a regular basis. Coverage needs to be diversified also in terms of specific sectors in society. For instance, the position of women in Lesotho, their status and what they are doing to improve it is one area that needs constant coverage given both their numbers and role in socio-development. This could be organised along the lines of assigning specific desks to deal economic to deal with key social issues such as gender issues, economy, politics and health. The organisational structure would depend on the capacity of the agency. What is important is to get away from the prevalent practice of, for example, saying something about AIDS only when a conference on AIDS is held or on AIDS day. The Media Policy Document Suggests that when LENA becomes a corporation it should continue to be funded by the government initially while at the same time aiming to raise revenues that will eventually make government's subsidy unnecessary. Given the level of media development in the country and the cost of collecting news it does not seem feasible for the agency to eventually get enough subscribers to finance its recurrent costs. It may therefore be necessary for the agency to adopt a more business like approach to raise more money by, for example, buying shares in thriving businesses.

LENA's records show that every year the agency organises short courses for its staff. 'The courses' duration range from one week to a month. They cover, for example, political reporting, environmental reporting, feature writing and basic news writing. Feature writing features almost every year. Despite this very few features are produced by the agency. There seems to be no system in place to ensure that those who receive training in what ever area of journalism do put in practice what they have learnt. Features would most probably be the main attraction to the many weekly newspapers in Lesotho. The few LENA features this writer came across between June and September 1997 were all used by the Mirror newspaper.

9.6 Rural reporting

Rural reporting is a very important area given that a large majority of Basotho live in the rural areas. Records show that some courses on rural news writing have been held in the past. The most recent one was held in April/May 1997. What is amazing is that these courses do not seem to have any impact in terms of the way stories from the districts are written. The explanation given by some of the district reporters was that they lacked transport to get to the villages on a regular basis and on their own. In an interview with this writer, Keneiloe Phits'ane, who worked for years as district reporter for LENA explained that district reporters do get a chance to go to the villages but mostly in the company of District Secretaries (DSs). She said District Secretaries visit development projects and address meetings in the villages fairly often. "We never really have much time to talk to the people during such occasions because once they are through they want to return to their offices and since we use their transport we have no choice but to return as well."

Related to the problem of rural areas is the apparent reluctance on the part of more qualified academically personnel such as university graduates to work in the districts. It must, however, be

pointed out that this problem is not peculiar to the agency. Civil servants general resent being, transferred from Maseru to the districts. Perceptions abound that people in the districts are usually not remembered when promotions are effected at the headquarters (Maseru). Except for the three mountain districts of Thaba Tseka, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek which experience extremely harsh winter conditions and also have highly inadequate economic infrastructures, the rest of the districts cannot be described as hardship areas. Nevertheless the importance of rural reporting requires that special steps be taken to make reporting in the

districts attractive to compensate for any perceived or real hardships associated with living in the districts.

If the agency is serious about rural reporting then that needs to be reflected in, among other things, the calibre of reporters posted in the districts. As of June 1997 only one senior reporter out of about eight was working in the districts and according to the management he was amongst the worst performers. In contrast the rest of senior reporters are based in Maseru. To attract the right calibre personnel to the districts incentives have to be offered. This could, for instance, be in the form of special attractive allowances for district reporters with the mountain districts attracting the most attractive packages. The agency also needs to explore the efficacy of recruiting its staff from people already living in the districts as they are already familiar with the environment.

Another possible alternative is to attach a high salary grade to posts in the districts so that those working in the districts are paid higher salaries compared to most of those working in the capital. For these incentives to be effective they need to be performance related so that it is not the physical presence of one in the district that matters but also more importantly one's performance. Giving incentives to and/or promoting individuals on the bases of their performance is critical in boosting the morale and confidence of workers. As in the civil service promotion are very much linked to 'seniority' it is important for LENA to shed this amazing criterion when it becomes a corporation. While seniority cannot be completely ignored promotions should be based primarily on one's performance. Working in the districts amongst the poor and the disadvantaged should be seen as a challenge and an invaluable experience which should count as an important factor when promoting reporters.

For the first time Lesotho's current national development plan makes mention of LENA and this could be signalling that the government now realizes importance of including strategic media organisations such as LENA in their national plans. What the agency needs, though, is reasonable funding, recruitment of people of the right calibre and, as the media policy states, editorial and operational independence. As moves to level the playing field in terms of communication environment get underway LENA's role will become critical in addressing the informational needs of the people especially the previously marginalised sections of the nation.

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