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Book Review

At the Crossroads: ICT Policymaking in East Africa, edited by Florence E. Etta and Laurent Elder, East African Educational Publishers/IDRC, 2005

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A growing number of African countries are in the process of formulating their information and communication technology (ICT) policies. The collection of articles in *At the Crossroads: ICT Policymaking in East Africa*[2] tells the story of inception of ICT policy across 22 chapters and through the eyes of 32 authors. The book documents the experience of ICT policymaking in four East African countries, but maintains the Kenyan case as its focal point, describing and commenting on the process and inception of Kenyan ICT policy, and relating the experiences, challenges and strategies faced during this convoluted process.

At the Crossroads is divided into five sections: an introduction, the history of ICT policymaking in Kenya, sectoral and thematic histories, learning from others, and conclusions. In the introduction, Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, the Minister for Planning and National Development, shares his personal experience of a national consultative process to determine a national course of action, which his Ministry supervised. This sets the tone and stage for much of the next section, section 2, which is devoted to the history of ICT policymaking in Kenya. Four of the six chapters in this section recount the path that the country has walked on this long journey. Tim Waema, Professor at the University of Nairobi, narrates the many false starts, while attempting to explain why each successive move seemed to be unsuccessful. The section narrates both stories of personal involvement in the process as well as institutional contributions. In chapter 7, two staff members of the Communications Commission of Kenya, one of them the Chief Executive Officer, recount research and experiences with one of the most important issues in contemporary telecom: universal access.

The contributions in section 3 are a kaleidoscope of related subjects. Although interesting, they form the least coherent part of the book. Section 4 is devoted to stories of policymaking in other countries. Rwanda's history is told by Professor Silas Lwakabamba, and two contributions from Uganda, by David Obot, Fred Kintu and Laurent Elder, and Goretti

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2 This e-book can be viewed online or downloaded from www.idrc.ca/en/ev-23583-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Amuriat and Dorothy Okello, give readers a glimpse of what has transpired there. David Sawe shares his experience of the impact of the e?ThinkTankTz as a story of successful lobbying in Tanzania. Benchmarking, the new term for constructive comparison, juxtaposes the Kenyan experience with Malaysian, Singaporean, Egyptian and South African ones in chapter 19. It is fitting for a section on "learning from others" to also examine a developed European country. Matti Kääriäinen's contribution narrates the Finnish experiences.

In the concluding section, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza offers a sobering picture of developments, inviting and exhorting readers to circumspection in matters of ICT on the continent. In the final chapter, Florence Etta, while summarising salient elements and experiences of policymaking, recommends responsible policymaking as the way forward.

One contributor, **Warigia Bowman**, reported on the role of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) and the Kenya Information and Communications Technology Federation (KIF). She offered further comments on Kenya's ICT policy one year after publication of the book.

What is the status of the ICT policy in Kenya - has it been approved? Since when?

WB: Kenya published an ICT policy document in March [2006]. This document incorporated comments from the public. However, this document does not have any legislative status. It does not have the force of law. Currently, the Kenyan Ministry of Information and Communications has circulated an ICT Bill. The Ministry is in the process of collecting comments on that Bill. There is not a clear linkage between the Bill and the policy.

For whom, in your opinion, is the policy made: general people, businesses, or other?

WB: The ICT policymaking process has been an elite-driven process. The main drivers have been the private sector, through a trade association called the Kenya ICT Federation (KIF), as well as civil society, through an organisation called the Kenya ICT Network (Kictanet). To some extent, Kictanet represents social justice interests, by including representatives of open source organisations, gender activists and the youth. However, there is also a high level of private sector participation in Kictanet. Finally, the government is under no legal or regulatory obligation to consider the public's comments on the ICT policy in Kenya, which weakens the democratic implications of the policy.

Who really benefits now that the ICT policy is in place?

WB: The *policy* probably is good for the Kenyan economy. It stabilises and clarifies the market to some extent for both large multinationals as well as for smaller technology-focused businesses in Kenya.

Do you think it is a good policy, or not, and for what reason?

WB: The policy is fairly good, as it benefited enormously from public comment. The Bill, however, does not match the policy, and fails to adequately address how rural connectivity

will be achieved and paid for, and on what time frame. Also, the Kenyan telecommunications sector really suffers from a duopoly. Accordingly, Kenyan law needs to force a liberalisation of the market to drive prices down for consumers. That is missing from the Bill as it currently stands.

Do you think that the Kenyan ICT policy process is an example for the region?

WB: I would say that the Kenyan ICT policy process has been incremental yet 'authentic'. What I mean by that is that the policy process has been slow, and has proceeded in fits and starts. However, the policy process has been driven by Kenyan citizens, not donors, for the most part. By contrast, the ICT policy process in Rwanda has been largely donor-directed. Only time will tell which is more effective, but I anticipate that the Kenyan process will have more buy-in from local constituents. It has been an extremely positive development that the Kenyan government has considered public comments at all with regard to the policymaking process. This is a sign that democratic reform in Kenya is actually working and that the people's voice is increasing.

A policy is only one side of the coin. When the right regulatory mechanisms are not in place, there is a big chance of an unimplemented policy or a wrongly implemented policy. Does Kenya have regulatory mechanisms in place to guide the implementation of the policy?

WB: Kenya has a very efficient and technically skilled regulator, the Communications Commission of Kenya. This entity is one of the most independent of all government bodies in Kenya. However, there is not a dedicated regulator for ICT in Kenya. It has yet to be established. The current entity the National Communications Secretariat, housed inside of the Ministry of Information and Communications, is a relic of the 1998 Telecommunications Act. This entity has struggled with a culture of secrecy, which has made cooperation difficult with more progressive entities such as the CCK and the Directorate of E?government housed inside the President's office.

You have monitored the process closely. Are there some final recommendations that you would like to make?

WB: As Tim Waema of the University of Nairobi and I recommended in our article to the Ministry of Planning on this topic, Kenyan ICT needs institutional and organisational reorganisation. At a minimum, the relationship between the Directorate of E?government, CCK, NCS, and the Ministry of Information must be clarified. CCK's powers need to be expanded to include ICT. In addition, Kenya could probably benefit from the establishment of an entity that would direct ICT policy and planning at the national level, as exists in Rwanda. It makes sense that such an entity would absorb or incorporate NCS and E?government. At a minimum, cultural change needs to take place inside of NCS to enhance cooperation with

entities inside of government, as well as with the private sector and civil society outside of government. Finally, all government entities, especially those dealing with ICT, need to create a culture of transparency and accountability.

The book tells a multi-faced story of policymaking in Africa and draws lessons from what worked and what did not; it recounts research as well as daily experiences of ICT policymaking; and it captures elements of both process and outcome. The sole focus on policymaking is both the strength as well as the weakness of the book. As Bowman articulates, the transition from a policy document to an implemented policy comes with challenges. In Kenya, as in other countries, the implementation of the ICT policy establishes a new playing field, with new players and rules. Strong and knowledgeable regulators are needed to guide and safeguard this process. Civil society will have to take up its role as advocate to see that groups in society do not lose out in the implementation of the ICT policy, and industry will need to adapt to the new environment. At present, many countries are at the eve of the implementation of their ICT policy and we are eagerly waiting for a new book that will describe the ICT policy implementation process in Kenya and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. ❑