Slosberg Report

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Mobile telephones play a key role in Information and Communication Technologies For Development (ICT4D) practices for communities in the Global South (Mutsivairo, 2016). Mobile telephone internet data packages have provided more potential internet accessibility for citizens in societies where this access was previously limited, thus arguably increasing the potential for development and advocacy to occur through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). (Bissyandé et al 2014). Known as Africa's 'Silicon Valley,' or 'Silicon Savannah'[1] rather, Kenya is a leader on the continent for its innovative ICT4D practices. For two years in a row, Nairobi was named the 'smartest city in Africa' by the Intelligent Community Forum[2] for its contribution towards building an economy that can excel solely on broadband. According to recent sector statistics from Kenya's Communications Authority, Kenya has over 90% mobile penetration[3]. Google's Consumer Barometer identified that smartphone uptake in Kenya was at 44% in 2016.

Mobile data is the means by which most youth from Africa access the internet (Bosch 2017). In February 2016, GeoPoll conducted a poll on mobile usage and media consumption reflecting that social network platforms are particularly integral to Kenyan youth media consumption as 60% use social media as their primary source of information, television comes second at 25%, and newspapers are the least utilized source at 6%.

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[1] https://qz.com/1059305/kenyas-newest-tech-hubs-are-sprouting-outside-its-silicon-savannah-in-nairobi/

[2] http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/10/africa/nairobi-africa-intelligent-city/index.html

[3] http://allafrica.com/stories/201702020136.html

Despite Kenya's impressive mobile data penetration rates, poverty and unemployment plague Kenya's youth, especially in the country's slums. Forty five percent of Kenya's population lives in poverty. One in five Kenyan youth are unemployed[4] and Nairobi hosts the highest number of unemployed young adults in the country. Eighty percent of Kenya's population is younger than 35[5]. The youth in Kenya constitute over 50% of the electorate[6]. The year 2017 marked Kenya's second general election since adopting the 2010 Constitution. The first under this Constitution, in 2013, had lower youth voter turnout than anticipated. In 2016, the United Nations (UN) World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement[7] highlighted that youth participation in electoral processes are on the decline on a global scale. The report also reflected that young adult citizenries who form electorates in Africa are far less likely (34.5% compared to 66.2% in South America) to vote than their counterparts from other continents.

Why are youth participation figures in Africa lower than those of their counterparts? What are some of the communication shortfalls contributing to this problem? Since most young Kenyans acquire most of their information online, what communication efforts have been made by Kenyan civil society to address this political engagement gap for the 2017 election? Kenya's high mobile penetration rates, its digitally savvy youth demographic forming over half of the electorate, the previous low levels of Kenyan youth civic engagement and being a Global Communications student in the Development Track, all contribute to why I wanted to examine the role of ICTs in youth civic engagement in Kenya. This study ultimately aims to contribute to critical, ICT4D and youth civic engagement literature by examining the case of SIDAREC during the 2017 Kenyan presidential election.

SIDAREC is a youth development organization that is based in the urban slum villages of Nairobi, Kenya. It works to achieve social justice for Nairobi's slum community through its core services: Early Childhood and Primary Development, Social Enterprise training and Development, Ghetto FM, ICT Training as well as Gender and Health development. SIDAREC's communication objectives include: "The responsibility of creating diverse channels of communication and producing IEC and other campaign material that address health and

[4] https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Kenya-tops-East-Africa-s-list-of-youth-joblessness/539546-3108514-6cd5xgz/index.html

[5] https://www.aku.edu/eai/Documents/kenya-youth-survey-report-executive-summary-2016.pdf

[6] http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/02/africa/kenya-election-guide/index.html

[7] https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-youth-report-on-youth-civic-engagement.html

economic empowerment while at the same time address the skills and knowledge gap among the community members."[8]

My study explored whether this 'knowledge gap' in the context of political engagement played a role in engagement (or disengagement), and to what extent through ICTs. As a community communication & development project, SIDAREC engages in advocacy on identified slum community needs through their community radio station Ghetto FM 99.9.

My project focused on SIDAREC's use of social media, in particular WhatsApp. I made use of interviews and a focus group. Three in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Director of SIDAREC, the Founder and Publisher of *The Star* media, and the Head of Ghetto FM radio station. In addition, a focus group consisting of SIDAREC's members who were recruited through the assistance of the NGO's Director and radio station manager. In-depth interview participants were chosen through purposeful sampling.

Each interview was approximately 45 minutes long and all were conducted in Nairobi, Kenya during the first presidential election cycle of 2017 using semi-structured interview methodology. The first interview was with the Director of SIDAREC. It was conducted to gain perspective on the reasons for the organization's civil society intervention focusing on youth in the community. It also aimed to gain more information about SIDAREC's social media platforms and civic engagement initiatives.

The Director of SIDAREC, Lucy, founded SIDAREC and the NGO emerged as a result of her Master's degree research that looked at a bottom-up development approach for informal, urban communities. She emphasized the importance of communication platforms in facilitating dialogue that could potentially change attitudes and, in turn, behavior and action to benefit the community.

The second interview was conducted with William Pike. Pike was the editor and managing director of the *New Vision* in Uganda for over two decades. With little investment, he turned it into a profitable newspaper company. In 2007 he moved to Kenya to start *The Star* newspaper. The interview with Pike as a publisher aimed to look at the question of online civic engagement from the point of view of the publisher, and to figure out to what degree disinformation was a problem

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[8] http://www.sidarec.org/

during the election period and what measures were taken to combat it.

The interview with the Ghetto FM station manager and focus group from SIDAREC were initiated to get insight on the station's social media platforms (WhatsApp in particular) and their role in communicating information and mobilizing community members through political deliberation and discussion during the election. The levels and sources of motivation for engaging politically (or not) were also discussed. The focus group consisted of SIDAREC members between the ages of 18 and 26.

The findings from the interviews revealed that some youth had experiences with disinformation leading up to the election. Therefore there is a possibility that they are demotivated by an information ecology that produces suspicion or cynicism. However, I wanted to look at the relationship between producers of information, platforms on which youth receive it (if at all), and their reception and views of it (the focus group). So I chose to speak to different points and people in the communication circuit. I did however pay careful attention to information subjects or interviewees might give that reveals alternate causes, extra—informational ones, such as cynicism about corruption.

The research revealed that ICT4D were an important resource for the organization and mobilization of SIDAREC's youth to participate in the networked public sphere and democratic process, both online and offline. The medium of ICTs had a compelling message to convey about youth civic engagement practice in Kenya. This is because of the catalytic role of ICT4D (mobile cellular devices in particular), in offering cheaper, more accessible access to social media networks that SIDAREC's youth used to engage and deliberate politically. This engagement was not limited to virtual public spaces as all but one of the participants from this case study participated in the electoral process by voting at polling stations offline. Just as ICT4D and its platforms played a role in providing spaces for youth discussion and engagement, so emotion also played a key part in youth mobilization. ICTs presented the platform for youth to share emotions (fear, anxiety, anger, hope and enthusiasm) and convert emotion into productive discourse and ultimately action. SIDAREC's WhatsApp group was vital for reducing fear of potential violence during the election, and indignation served as a motivating force to transform feelings of anger into active participation in Kenya's democracy. Hope and enthusiasm also manifested as a result of the collective sharing of emotion and experiences on

SIDAREC's ICT4D platforms. The social media platforms within ICT4D were important for the development of SIDAREC's civic engagement and democratic practice. The potential barriers to access accurate, truthful information on these platforms through the digital divide, attention and disinformation could have compromised ideal youth civic engagement levels online. This reduced potential to have access to participating in continuous, robust engagement online, could have also affected action offline. This is an ongoing potential threat to adequate levels of youth voter participation, which are the lowest throughout the Global South, the same region with the lowest access to ICTs in the world[9].

The analysis of the causal relationship between ICTs and youth political participation in this study also has potential traces of technological determinism. Technological determinism is a potential flaw of this study as there is still a correlation made between ICTs contributing to political participation and development. While the study illustrated that ICTs were important for democratic participation, the internet is only a platform that acts as a catalyst towards change. Social, economic and political change for youth cannot occur with ICTs alone.

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[9] http://www.oecd.org/sti/1888451.pdf