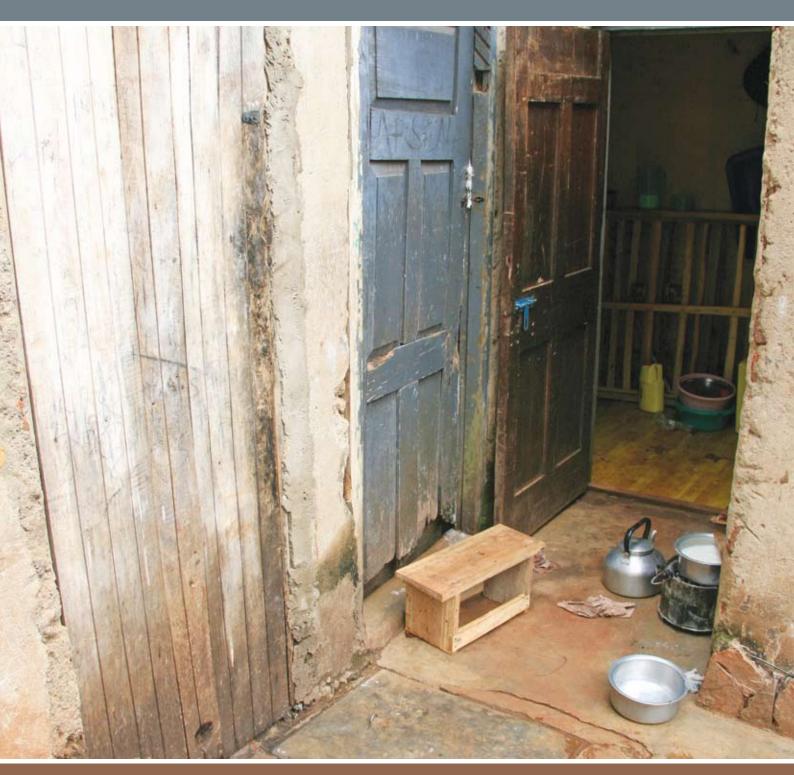
Coverage of poverty and inequality in the Kenya newspapers:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS, NOVEMBER 2005 – MARCH 2006



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine the treatment and issue substance accorded to the coverage of poverty and inequality in the daily newspapers of Kenya. The source of information used in this investigation was articles about poverty and inequality appearing in all the four newspapers from November 2005 through March 2006.

A total of 162 articles about poverty and inequality published in all the four daily newspapers by the country were identified and specifically assessed for language use, content of causes and approaches to reducing the level of poverty and inequality in the country as well as the voices included in the media discussion of this phenomenon.

The articles put under scrutiny were of various types, ranging from opinion, feature, editorial, news stories to letters to the editor, though opinion and feature types of articles constituted the majority. In terms of issue substance, it was found that a good number of articles had centred on economic and political dimensions of poverty and inequality in the country compared to other aspects such as culture, gender and regional configurations of the phenomenon. In overall, the articles examined indicated that the media houses in question had demonstrated a commendable effort in constructing the discussion of poverty and inequality around institutional structures rather than personalities, though much of the information used by the writers of these stories had been massively drawn from people in executive decision making echelons compared to those outside such offices. In addition, was found the existence of a gender gap in the proportion of persons whose voices were included in the articles on poverty and inequality in the newspapers, with skew being towards men.

On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that as part f their role in reducing the level of poverty and inequality in the country, the media houses in question should look forward to enhancing comprehensiveness with regard to issues and sources of information in the contents of articles on the subject.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY LIST OF FIGURE LIST OF TABLES	2 3 4 4
SECTION ONE 1.0 Introduction 1.1 Study objectives	6 7
SECTION TWO Data and methods	7
SECTION THREE Findings 3.1 Background characteristics of study items 3.1.1 Newspaper sources 3.1.2 Type and placement of articles in the newspapers 3.2 Language use in Poverty and Inequality coverage 3.3 Issue substance 3.3.1 Authenticity of contents 3.3.2 Center of information construction 3.3.3 Mobilizing information for poverty and inequality reduction 3.3.1 Themes 3.3.2 Dimensions of Poverty and Inequality covered 3.3.3 Voices in poverty and inequality coverage	8 9 9 10 10 10 10 10 10 12 14
SECTION FOUR SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	15
REFERENCES	17

List of Figures

Figure 1. Distribution of articles by newspapers8
Figure 2. Distribution of articles by coverage style9
Figure3: Proportion of articles under dimensions of poverty and inequality cover

List of tables

Table 1: Distribution of articles by date of publication	9
Table 2: Distribution of articles with slant language by coverage type	10

SECTION ONE

Introduction

The level of poverty and disparities across Kenyan socio-economic and regional divides has been a consistent subject of intense consideration in the planning and research circles of the country. This is evident in the series of government commitments such as the Sessional paper No. 10 of 1965, the 2003 Economic Recovery Strategy for Employment and Wealth Creation (ERS) and the ongoing Constituency Development Fund Scheme and associated survey reports on poverty and inequalities by Society for International Development (SID, 2004) and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2004, 2005). These surveys have been prompted by the near-universal recognition that appropriate action towards a significant reduction of poverty and inequality in any given society, like other social ills, be based on extensive and systematically acquired information.

To the extent poverty and disparities in a nation are spanned by an agglutination of myriad factors which must all be simultaneously addressed in a bid to ease the situation, human development agencies have a moral obligation to engage in an all-inclusive approach in favour of this accomplishment. This presupposes relying on much more holistic study findings such as those delving into the norms, attitudes and practices of a people for decision-making, rather than singly on survey results that tend to lay bare the state of a phenomenon but largely in quantitative terms.

But, how are we to deduce that the public is sufficiently involved in the maturity of a discourse necessary for reducing the level of poverty and a contingent social and economic disparity in the midst of its populace? The search for a solution to this uncertainty may be in the direction of analysis of mass media (Ohon, 2004). Owed to its distinctive position as the mirror of the society, an analysis of its treatment and content of the subject is likely to pave way to the general picture of the values animated in the debate about it.

Couched on the premise that the media ought to be itself sensitive to this matter and be capable of mobilizing the citizens to play a meaningful role towards reducing massive poverty and inequalities in the country, this study aspires to make a contribution in this direction under the Rich and Poor Project in Kenya by assessing how the media has performed in this primal quest for the period beginning November 2005 all through March 2006.

Restricting itself to the newspapers of the country, the study starts by exploring the treatment and content of issues related to poverty and inequalities by the mass media then, ultimately, suggests plausible mechanisms of making the media better responsive to the current public search for a way forward towards reducing these anomalies.

1.1 Study objectives

The goal of this study was to establish the treatment and prominence of poverty and inequality issues coverage in Kenyan newspapers from November 2005 to March 2006. Specifically, the study aspired:

a) To identify the number of articles mentioning poverty and inequality published in each newspaper during

the delineated period;

- b) To work out the frequency of headlines associated with the articles about the study subject.
- c) To identify the styles of articles adopted by respective media houses in relaying information about poverty and inequality in Kenya;
- d) To identify the themes under the subject of poverty and inequality attended to over the demarcated period;
- e) To identify the sources of information used in constructing articles on poverty and inequality in the country;
- f) To assess the language use in framing poverty and inequality articles published in the newspapers over the period under consideration; and
- g) To identify the persons whose voices appear in the articles concerning the study subject

SECTION TWO

Data and methods

The information required for this exercise was obtained from articles about poverty and inequality in Kenya carried in the four daily newspapers of the country – The Standard, Daily Nation, People Daily and Kenya Times – and their sister Sunday issues published all through November 2005 to March 31, 2006. This time frame was chosen because the aforementioned report (CBS, 2005) was launched in early November 2005, thereby leading to intense debate about the matter in the media while the days after March 31, 2006 were excluded from scrutiny because the subject had anyway become less topical in the newspapers and to allow for sufficient time for analysis and timely compilation of the report.

The pieces of information contained in the resultant clippings were thereafter coded both on the basis of the directions inherent in the specific objectives and according to the issues emerging from the articles as stipulated under the grounded theory. The codes were ultimately entered into computer under the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and frequencies subsequently run to show the distribution of various attributes under study.

In cases likely to have subjective judgment such as in the assessment of language and pictorial use in the articles, 10 percent of the articles were selected by way of systematic random sampling, and examined by two other people; one a journalist and the other a development studies professional. To reduce the chances of bias due to inter-coder agreement on these attributes, the two additional coders were not furnished with the details about the study objective. The statistic used for establishing the reliability of agreement among the raters of intercoder agreement was Cohen's kappa.*.

^{*} Cohen's kappa coefficient is a statistical measure of intercoder reliability. It is generally thought to be a more robust measure than simple percent agreement calculation since kappa takes into account the agreement occurring by chance. Cohen's kappa measures the agreement between two raters who each classify N items into C mutually exclusive categories. Cited from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohen%27s_kappa

SECTION THREE

Findings

The research yielded a sum of 193 articles about poverty and inequality appearing in the newspapers of the country during the delineated period. When subjected to screening, thirty-one of them were found inappropriate for the study on the basis that a vast proportion of their contents were detached from the subject matter, thereby leaving only 162 (83.64%) articles as credible for analysis. The crux of this section is to present the results of this analysis. It starts by outlining the background characteristics of the selected items then delves into the extent to which their contents demonstrated the particular perspectives of poverty coverage under examination.

3.2 Background characteristics of study items

3.2.1 Newspaper sources

The 162 articles came from all the four newspapers but in varied proportions. As figure 1 shows, The Daily Nation carried the majority of them (44.44%) followed by Kenya Times, The Standard and the People Daily with 22.84%, 19.75% and 12.96% proportions respectively.

These articles were published on various points in time over the study period. As shown in table 1, the majority (31.48%) were published during the month of January 2006 followed closely by March 2006 (27.78%) and the rest (40.74%) combined during November – December 2005 and February 2006.

Although the release of a report on "The Geographic Dimensions of well-being in Kenya" (CBS, 2005), it appears that it never led to an intense debate about poverty and inequality in the country's daily newspapers during that month compared to the kind that later took place during March 2006.

This may be attributed to the fact that much of public attention was then on the draft new constitution, on which a referendum was scheduled for three weeks time from the date the report was released.

The highest occurrence of articles for the analysis registered during the month of January was as a result of the drought and associated famine that hit

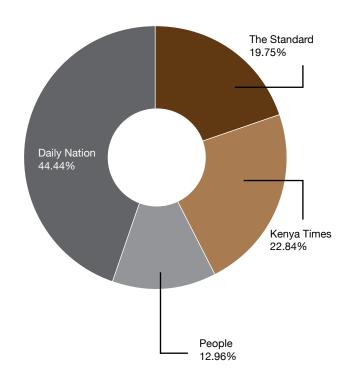


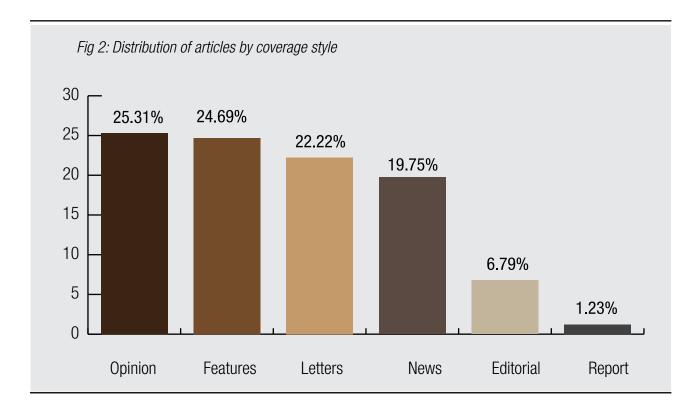
Figure 1: distribution of articles by newspapers

the country from the second half of December 2005 all through January 2006, a phenomenon that created room for a rigorous debate about the poverty and inequality situation in the decision-making domains of the country.

Table 1: Distribution of articles by date of publication				
Date of publication	Number of articles			
	Frequency	Percent		
November 2005	30	18.52		
December 2005	25	15.43		
January 2006	51	31.48		
February 2006	11	6.79		
March 2006	5	27.78		
Total	162	100.00		

3.2.2 Type and placement of articles in the newspapers

The articles on poverty and inequality subjected to scrutiny were found to have been of various types. As figure 2 indicates, opinion and commentary constituted the majority with 25.3% followed closely by articles of feature type (24.69%) and letters to the editor (22.22%). News articles formed 19.75% of the total while the rest (8.02%) were editorial and special reports on the subject combined.



COVERAGE OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN THE KENYA NEWSPAPERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS, NOVEMBER 2005 - MARCH 2006

Throughout the time under consideration, poverty and inequalities in Kenya made headline news on one day only. This occurred in the Daily Nation and Standard newspapers a day following the official release of the report of the second volume on the "Geographical dimensions of well-being in Kenya" (CBS, 2005). The Kenya Times issue of that day carried the subject on its first page but not as headline news. To this degree, an overwhelming proportion (98.77%) of the stories examined in this study were not headline news items.

3.3 Language use in Poverty and Inequality coverage

In this study, articles about poverty and inequality in the country were examined for presence of slant. Based on the strength of agreement among independent raters (K=0.74)z, the portrayal of this attribute was found to be very low, as only 25 articles (15.43%) identified contained slant expressions. These articles were typified by expressions such as "we have become victims of public manipulations. And we are hooked to go through the same cycle every season" z or "Women's leadership in this country carries itself like a petrified mouse faced with a fat cat"z and in reference to poor people as "down trodden" z "third class citizens"z.

When articles carrying slant connotations were cross-examined with coverage categories, the picture that emerged was that slightly over half (52%) of them and another 28% were feature type articles against only 16% being letters to the editor (see table 2). This observation raises the possibility that the presence of slant expressions in some articles about poverty and inequality in the country was a symbol that this is a matter treated with a very deep sense of sympathy of the public*z*.

Table 2: Distribution of articles with slant language by coverage type			
Coverage styles	Frequency		
	Count	Percentage	
Opinion/Commentary	13	52	
Feature	7	28	
Letters to the Editor	4	16	
Other	1	4	
Total	25	100	

1 November 2, 2006

2 According to Landis and Koch's (1977) "Measurement of observer agreement for categorical data", Biometrics, 33:159174, cited in Stemler (2001), this value falls within the bounds of "substantial" scale of strength of agreement (0.61 - 0.80).

3 Kenya Times, November 18, 2005, p. 10, 4 Daily Nation, March 10, 2006, p.8, 5 Kenya Times, November 26, 2005, p.8, 6 People Daily, November 3,2005, p.6, 7 Articles of opinion, commentary or feature type in the newspapers are likely to be much more thought out and researched than news stories or letters to the editors.

3.3 Issue substance

3.3.1 Authenticity of contents

This study assessed the extent to which the use of facts as a virtue in communicating development matters was observed in the articles under scrutiny. The results of analysis of this aspect were largely in affirmative. This is to the extent a vast majority of the articles (82.72%) were found to contain information acquired from credible sources against only 28 (17.28%) that fell in the otherwise.

When the 28 articles with doubtful source credibility were cross examined with regard to their coverage style, a good proportion of them (67.86%) were found to had been letters to the editor in comparison to opinion or commentary articles that constituted a paltry 10.71%. This evidence appears to corroborate the contention that letters to the editor may not be a precise reflection of public opinion on a given subject**s**

3.3.2 Center of information construction

Couched on the premise that communication scientists have a tendency to construct stories around individuals and personalities rather than structures and social forces*9*, this study also set out to assess the extent to which this practice had taken place with regard to coverage of poverty and inequality in the daily newspapers in the country. However, the results pointed to the negative given that only two articles of news type were found to be isomorphic with this maxim *10*.

3.3.3 Mobilizing information for poverty and inequality reduction

Stemming from the premise that in their agenda setting role, the mass media practitioners have a responsibility to treat the recipients to a set of mobilizing information *m*, this study set out to examine the articles about poverty and inequality for content of information that can be used as guidance for action in the way of addressing the dearth of these anomalies in the country. The primary indicators in this assessment were the thematic areas, dimensions of poverty and inequality in focus and the status disposition distinctions of persons highlighted in the articles.

3.3.3.1 Themes

A wide range of themes was found to have been encompassed in the articles. These could be broadly classified as causes and proposed solutions to poverty and inequality in the country. The proportion of the scrutinized articles that mentioned causes and proposed solutions was 53.09% and 51.23 % respectively.

Unconducive governance, pursuance of inappropriate economic policies and massive corruption were the most explicit causes of poverty and inequality in the country mentioned in the articles. With regard to governance, a

COVERAGE OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN THE KENYA NEWSPAPERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS, NOVEMBER 2005 - MARCH 2006

⁸ see Roberts, Sikorski and Paisley (1969) and Grey and Brown (1970)., 9 Emke (2000), p.2, 10 People Daily, November 3, 2005:4; and November 5, 2005: 24, 11 Defined by Lemert et al. (1977:721) as "information which allows people to act on those attitudes which they might already have", it hereunder refers to information that casts into glare the existing opportunities and challenges before the citizens towards a meaningful reduction of poverty and inequality in their midst,

particular editorial column of Kenya Times succinctly warned: "Kenyans must, however, take cognizance that there is a strong positive correlation between politics and economy. Once we get our politics right everything else will be put in perspectives" **12** and about the country's economic model, a letter to the Editor of People Daily, noted that "The Kenyan investment ideology has the overall effect of making people dependent and therefore poor". **13**

A good number of proposals towards reducing the level of poverty and inequality in Kenya were advanced in the articles. These ranged from rethinking the economic model especially with regard to distribution of opportunities and resources, enhancing a strong sense of prudence in politicians and people in decision-making hierarchies, embracing modern information and communication technology, closer involvement of all people in formulation of the poverty and inequality related policies to promoting a stronger sense of gender equality in the populace.

Although a vast proportion of articles herein analyzed were found to have made a commendable effort in the direction of highlighting these possible paths to reverting the appalling level of poverty and inequality in Kenya, a vast majority of them tended to center around only aspect of the problem. Articles in which the writers urged for a simultaneous set of approaches towards this phenomenon given complex contingence of factors, as contained in bold statements such as "Kenya's unequal development is not a product of economic factors alone" **14**, were found to be very rare.

3.3.3.2 Dimensions of Poverty and Inequality covered

Another substantial aspects of articles in question for which they were examined in the study was the dimensions of the subject therein highlighted. These were found to fall under social, economic, cultural, gender, governance and regional disparities.

The associated frequencies of occurrence are presented in *figure 3*. As the corresponding entries under this figure shows, majority of the articles pointed to the economic and governance perspectives of poverty and inequality (51.23% and 49.38% respectively, followed closely by social (45.06%) and regional disparities (42.59%) in the country.

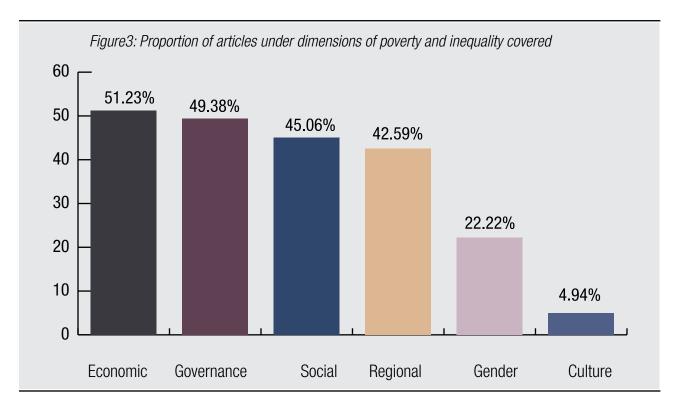
Under economy, the most frequently discussed item in the articles was an imbalance in the distribution of national resources and under governance, ideological differences portrayed by persons in elective offices was found to be the dominant attribute. Regional variances in Kenya were mostly brought out in terms of provinces compared to districts or locations. The social perspective of poverty and inequality in the country was covered in terms of educational and health polarities.

Figure 3 further shows that discussions about gender and cultural dimensions of poverty and inequality in the Kenyan newspapers during the period under consideration occurred quite dismally, with only a sum of 36 (22.22%) and 8 (4.94%) articles mentioning these matters respectively. The slowness of the media practitioners to stimulate public debate about the former (gender) became more pronounced in the results of analysis of persons in the story **15**, which showed that women received a disproportionate attention to men with regard to discussions on

12 Kenya Times, November 4, 2005: 8, 13 People Daily, November 11, 2005: 7, also in Kenya Times, November 10, 2005: 10, 14 Carried in the editorial column of Kenya Times, November 3, 2005, p.8 15 See part 3.3.3.3 for a more detailed picture of men and women treatment in stories about poverty and inequality in the country over the delineated period.

poverty and inequality in the newspapers. The dimensions of poverty and inequality debate was found to be heavily skewed in the direction of attitudes about fertility regulation and its implications on the welfare of people.

One of the issues of the People Daily, for example, reported a top public servant in the health sector as having said that "negative attitude towards family planning [is] part of the woes around poverty in Nyanza". **16**

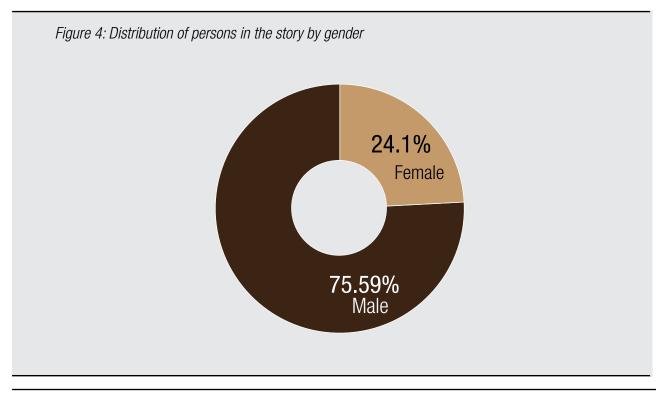


16 People Daily, November 5, 2005, 18. To the extent it emerged that similar sentiments, what they occurred, had been attributed to women only, it raises the possibility that the male cohort of the country's population have not been adequately integrated in the search for a favorable attitude towards reproductive health and services, a phenomenon that is likely to slow down the pace of bridging the poverty and inequality gap in the country.

3.3.3.3 Voices in poverty and inequality coverage

This study also sought to establish the extent of gender and social distinctions of persons whose views were used by writer in shaping articles about poverty and inequality in the country. A total of 123 articles (75.93%) were found to have at least quoted a person, either directly or indirectly against only 39 (24.07%) that fell did otherwise. Persons quoted in the 123 stories were found to have been drawn from a multiple social standing, with a majority being from the political caucus and least from the rather little influential members of the country's population. This observation could be partially attributed to the location of all the headquarters of the media houses under consideration in the country's most pre-eminent environment and to the general tendency of journalists to overly focus on people in executive positions compared to those in the lower cadre for references against the information they use in writing the articles.

In terms of gender, a vast majority of persons quoted in the articles were found to had been men (75.9%) compared to women whose corresponding proportion was only 24.1% (see figure 4). This finding is in harmony with those of numerous random and non-random studies done in the past few years that the voices of women are often less frequently found in the mass media information output (cf. Gallager, 2005). This scenario may be attributed to the low number of women both in the mass media employee and in the executive decision-making hierarchies of the country (Kabaji, 1997; Kweyu, 2006). This thesis was succinctly attested to in the words of the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources in her call for "building institutional capacity of ministries and parastatals to integrate gender issues" **17**.



17 People Daily, November 4, 2005, p.8

SECTION FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the treatment and issue substance accorded to coverage of poverty and inequality in the Kenyan daily newspapers from November 2005 through March 2006. By examining the information content of the articles about the subject published in the for daily newspapers of the country, the study managed to establish the extent to which the media houses in question had dealt with the matter of poverty and inequality and the quality of discourse around it.

A good number of articles about poverty and inequality were found to have been published in all the four newspapers during the delineated period. A large amount of them were of opinion and feature types compared to only a few news story articles. While this points to the possibility that the concerned media houses caused more elaborate and well researched information to reach the public, it raises the possibility that a significantly large number of journalists in the country are a little slow to notice poverty and inequality related events.

When the articles were assessed for presentation of factual information, the picture that emerged pointed to the affirmative, with the exception of some letters to the editor in which the information carried were majorly hypothetical connotations in comparison to verifiable statements.

Regarding the focus of article construction, the clippings were inspected for moulding the discussions around the subject under investigation around personalities or institutional structures. To the extent only two articles were found to had been constructed around individuals, it suffices to conclude that newspaper media houses in the country had made a great attempt to promote a sense of building stronger institutional structures rather than perpetuated idiosyncratic positions in their content creation processes.

Another substantial matter assessed in this investigation was the themes of the articles, with special references to causes and possible solutions to the advanced problem of poverty and inequality advanced in the associated articles, in this respect, was found that a lot of attention had been devoted to the economic and governance perspectives yet others like the cultural dimension of poverty and inequality were found to have been nearly neglected. On further examination of the possible approaches towards reducing the levels of poverty and inequality in the country highlighted, the articles under scrutiny were found to had concentrated on only single aspects of the phenomenon-economic, social, regional disparity and political representation – yet articles likely to invite the public to consider a holistic approach in addressing this issue, given its complex agglutination of factors, were found to be very few.

When an inspection of the gender and social distinctions of the people quoted in the articles was carried out, the picture that emerged was that of a high tendency on the part of authors to mostly seek the voices of people in the executive ranks of decision-making in comparison to persons detached from these hierarchies. The matter for gender disparity in the information sources as reflected in the articles was found to be even more apparent to the extent it was found that men constituted a solid higher proportion of people cited in the articles than women.

These findings provide plausible evidence to assert that the Kenyan newspapers have demonstrated an indelible effort to engage the public in the discussion about poverty and inequality in the country, yet the magnitude of the unmet needs in this exercise creates little room for complacency. In order that these information outlets be strategically placed to play a more crucial role in the search for a less poverty stricken and parallel Kenya, the following propositions are advanced:

- The media houses should instill a more rigorous sense of concern in poverty and inequality incidences to be reflected in the spot news type articles.
- Content of extensively verifiable information should be entrenched as a crucial parameter for discerning appropriate letters to the editor selected for publication.
- Studies in the past few decades have consistently indicated that poverty and inequalities are spanned by a multiple of factors yet the articles written about this subject herein examined were found to have majorly concentrated on the political and economic dimensions. There is therefore, an urgent need for the media houses to recognize this fact hence treat the readers to articles that discuss this subject in a more holistic way. Only then can the public and decision-makers comprehensively develop associated interventions.
- The media practitioners may enhance a sense of participatory approach in poverty and inequality debate by reaching a wider calibre of people rather than majorly focus on people in the executive decisionmaking hierarchies as is currently the case.
- The media community has a moral obligation to promote a gender equality dimensions in the discussions about poverty and inequality in Kenya by striving to maintain a balance between the male and female voices found in their information products.

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