

World Press Freedom Day: How technology impacts journalism in Kenya

By [Carole Kimutai](#): [@CaroleKimutai](#)

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The world has dedicated one day in a year to scribes 3rd May. This is [World Press Freedom Day](#). According to the United Nations, it is a day that "celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession".

As a Kenyan based journalist, I have a lot to celebrate and moan about. The first is a tribute to the late Frank Odoi, a Ghanaian born cartoonist who was based in Kenya. Odoi was a pioneer cartoonist at the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation* three decades ago. Editorial cartoons are a standard feature in Kenyan newspapers and Odoi worked with many newspapers in Kenya and Uganda. He will be remembered for the many comic books he published including the popular *Akokhan* comic book.

A technology perspective

I will evaluate press freedom in Kenya from a technology perspective because to me that is worth celebrating. Press freedom has come a long way; from the days of single-party in the 1980s to the liberalisation of the airwaves in the late 1990's. We now have various broadcasting media outlets and a growing print industry.

The greatest development has been on the digital space. When president [Mwai Kibaki addressed](#) a three-day East African Journalists Convention in Nairobi, Kenya early this week, he appealed to users of new media in Africa to exercise their freedoms responsibly and use such platforms to promote development, peace and cohesion.

"Our young people should especially view new media as modern empowering tools and not avenues to corrupt their morals," said Kibaki.

President Kibaki noted that new media has given rise to an extraordinary level of media freedom by enabling citizens to bring about massive social and political transformations. According to recent statistics, Kenya is second in Africa in the use of the social networking sites almost at two million.

Because of technology, the phrase "breaking news" has taken a new meaning. Newspapers have to work harder to get a scoop. Journalists have to sharpen their nose for news and leave their desks in search of news. With Twitter and Facebook every time there is news breaking. It is no longer journalists who are breaking the news but ordinary citizens who have a phone - 52% of online users in Kenya access the internet on mobile handsets.

What does this mean?

Everyone including citizen journalists is enjoying the freedom of expression that has been brought about by the internet. You do not have to wait to go to the newsroom to write your copy or edit an audio or visual clip to be aired as news. Using technology, journalists are now tweeting about events as they happen from wherever they are.

It is this freedom that is transforming the Kenyan society as citizens interrogate issues, events and personalities. Audiences are also scrutinizing how media reports events. Reality is no longer defined by gatekeepers, everyone has an opinion and it counts. The freedom I am celebrating is the expansion of the media space, the opportunity to interact and engage news makers who were previously hard to reach and the fact that I do not need to be a media mogul to own a media house!

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