



Kenya Film Classification Board

Preliminary Research Report

The effects of Lewd, Vulgar, Violent and Obscene Local and International Music on Children, Youth and the Society in general in Kenya

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1.0 Background

The Kenya Film Classification Board is a State Corporation under the Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts mandated by Films and Stage Plays Act Cap 222 of Laws of Kenya to regulate the creation, broadcasting, possession, distribution and exhibition of films in the country with a view to promote **national values** and **morality**.

The Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA) further empowers the Board to; impose age restrictions to ensure that content which depicts or contains scenes that are rated as adult or are of the language intended for adult audiences are not aired during the watershed period (between 5am -10 pm) and to enforce the programming Code for the free-to-air radio and TV services by ensuring that all programme and non-programme matter, namely commercials, infomercials, documentaries, programme promotions, programme listings, community service announcements and station identifications are classified before they air.

The Board primarily classifies and rates films by examining them and giving them a 'certificate of approval' along with its rating of 0 to 4. This scale indicates the 'impact' of the film: "low", "mild", "moderate" or "strong". This then corresponds to the general rating of the film: GE (general exhibition), PG (parental guidance recommended), 16 (not suitable for persons under the age of 16) and 18 (not suitable for persons under the age of 18).

After the certificate of approval is issued, the classification officer records the name of the film, its country of origin, rating and the date of rating and publishes the information in the KFCB classification catalogue.

The Board's other activities include licensing film distributors in the country by granting film regulatory licenses to the distributors, and checking for violation of the terms of the license, including "license expiry, sale of unrated movies, sale/showing of restricted movies and misuse of classification labels.



2.0 Introduction

The Kenya Film Classification Board has continued to receive and record complaints from across Kenya regarding vulgar and obscene music played in public spaces within the watershed hours.

However, most of the complaints are shared through channels and other media that do not come to the attention of the Board.

It is against this backdrop that the Board deemed it important and urgent to undertake a preliminary survey to assess the gravity of the situation across the country.

It is hoped that this report will go a long way not only in aiding the Board to effect its mandate, but create guidelines for law enforcement agencies, while banning in totality the music found unfit for the general public during the watershed period.

3.0 Scope & Objectives of the Research

In line with the mandate of the Board, the Consultant was tasked to undertake a Social Research by watching and listening to music and videos produced by local and international musicians. The consultant was also expected to visit varied and random locations, undertake interviews and observe the areas the music is played, and the reactions of the people in those spaces.

This is against a public outcry over significant percentage of offensive local and international music that is slowly dominating the Kenyan music and video landscape. These complaints have been directed to the Board, and also shared through other channels including mainstream and social media.

Of great concern is the impact the music in question has continued to have on children, the youth and the community in general, given the obscenities that have gradually become the hallmark of most of the music, earning the musicians fans in their thousands while creating distress especially to parents, guardians and society in general.

4.0 Statement of the Problem

The Kenya music industry has recorded phenomenal growth in the past two decades, from a small and struggling industry in the 90s to the influential multi-million business it is today.

This can be attributed to many factors, but primarily due to technological advancement and adoption, coupled with a less stringent democratic society buoyed by expanded rights and freedoms, particularly the freedoms of expression.

These freedoms have to a large extent been abused and misused by composers, producers and promoters of music, especially secular music.

Our liberal society has either lowered or erased all moral boundaries in the name of rights, democracy and freedoms, leading to unprecedented exposure of children and youth to hitherto taboo adult content that has continued to negatively affect and influence our young people into crimes and other vices that were completely unfathomable just a few years ago.

The greatest and gravest concern at the moment is the particular **glorification and glamorization of sex and sexually explicit content, the open abuse of alcohol, drugs and substances**, in complete contravention of existing laws, which has continued to be packaged as “the in-thing” and “cool”.

It is an undisputable global reality that indeed “sex sells” hence the use of sexually appealing images and videos not only in advertising but more intensely in music.

The impact of music on the soul cannot be gainsaid, with evidence running back to the medieval times.

5.0 Methodology

The Consultant undertook a Simple Random Survey (SRS) combining various methods of research to understand and evaluate the impact of lewd, vulgar, violent and obscene local and international music on over 40 tribes in Kenya.

The Consulting Team traveled, by random public means, to and around all the major towns in Kenya including, but not limited to, Nairobi, Mombasa, Malindi, Kisumu, Kakamega, Eldoret, Nakuru, Nyeri, Murang’a, Thika, Meru, Narok, Kisii, Migori, Siaya, Bungoma, Kitale and adjoining towns covering over 30 counties.

Primarily, three methods were deployed:

5.1 Observation and Listening to Recorded Music

The first phase of the research comprised of listening to and watching numerous songs and videos of local and international artistes.

The objective was to interpret the songs’ general and deeper/implied meanings with the view of identifying any obscenities and profanities either in:

- the artistes stage names
- song titles
- Lyrics and
- Videos

The Consultant also took time to attend random events over the initial period of two (2) weeks comprising weddings, funerals and other social events, studying the composition

of the audience at those events, the type of music played, the times the music was played and how the audience responded/related to the music.

By traveling using public means, the Consultant was able to not only listen to what is played in most of the *matatus* and buses first-hand, but also observe the reactions of different passengers to the music, especially that which would be considered obscene.

The Consultant also patronized hotels, restaurants and bars in all the towns visited, alongside posing as a customer at music stores in the region, a majority of which are located near or adjacent to **public bus parks** and other public utilities.

5.2 Interviews

Respondents were randomly chosen, constituting both males and females from different age groups, social classes and occupations. The respondents comprised of:

- School-going children
- Teenagers in out of school
- Youth in and out of college
- Parents, guardians, teachers and general adults
- *Matatu* drivers and their crew
- Music store owners, distributors and sellers
- Hotel, restaurant and bar owners, attendants and patrons
- Clergy and other religious leaders
- The Provincial Administration
- Political leaders

The primary objective was to get the perceptions of children, the youth and adults on local and international artistes and their songs and videos.

The research also focused on trying to empirically establish the social and psychological effects and impact the music had on the respondents, if any, wherever it was possible to extract a response that could be qualified.

5.3 Review of Existing Researches

From the outset of the research, it was evident that there are no existing or published researches on the effects and impact of lewd, vulgar, violent and obscene music on children, the youth and society in general in Kenya. As such, it was of paramount importance to review existing researches.

This decision was informed by the fact that social behavior and outcomes tend to possess and retain certain general characteristics despite geographical and cultural differences. These characteristics are mostly similar and uniform across age groups and social classes, particularly among children and the youth.

The core objective was to draw parallels and comparative analytics based on the findings of this specific research.

6.0 Case Study – California, USA

The best music . . . is essentially there to provide you something to face the world with.

—Bruce Springsteen

Music can change the world.

—Ludwig van Beethoven

Music is spiritual. The music business is not.

—Van Morrison

In a research conducted by Donald F. Roberts, Peter G. Christenson, and Douglas A. Gentile in the United States in 2003, the effects of violent music have a huge impact especially on children and youth.

Although much of the debate about the effects of media on youth revolves around television, music is very important to children and adolescents. For instance, try to change the radio station at home or in the car after your child has set it, and you will quickly see that they have very clear and deeply held opinions.

In a survey of junior and senior high school students in northern California (Roberts & Henriksen, 1990), students were asked what media they would choose to take with them if they were stranded on a desert island. They were allowed to nominate a first, second, and third choice from a list including: TV set, books, video games, computer, newspapers, VCR and videotapes, magazines, radio, and music recordings and the means to play them. Because radio is almost exclusively a music medium for adolescents, radio and recordings were combined into a single “music” category.

As the Table below displays, at all grade levels, music media were preferred over television (which placed second overall), and this preference increased with age. Over 80 percent of the total sample nominated music as one of their first three choices. By eleventh grade, music was selected first by a margin of two to one.

	<u>Seventh Grade (%)</u>		<u>Ninth Grade (%)</u>		<u>Eleventh Grade (%)</u>	
	TV	Music	TV	Music	TV	Music
First choice	26	40	29	44	26	52
First two choices	43	66	49	73	43	80
First three choices	57	82	65	86	61	90

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest percentage

Source: Adapted from Roberts, D. F., & Henriksen, L. (1990, June). Music listening vs. television viewing among older adolescents. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dublin, Ireland.

Music's importance to youth can also be measured by the amount of time they spend listening to it. One sample of Southeastern junior high school students spent an average of three hours per day listening to music and over four hours watching television (Brown, Campbell, & Fischer, 1986).

More recent studies have shown similar high numbers for music. In a study of over 600 eighth and ninth graders from public and private schools in Minnesota (Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, in press), children reported spending an average of almost 21 hours per week listening to music, compared to 25 hours per week watching television.

This pattern can also be seen across larger age ranges, although the amount of time spent with music increases with age (e.g., Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999).

However, it is likely that most studies underestimate the amount of time children and adolescents may listen to music, because music is so often a secondary background activity for many other activities, such as reading, studying, talking, driving, and doing housework. Music's tendency to slip between foreground and background raises questions about what kind of "listening" should be counted as true exposure. We believe background listening ought to be included, and for those who might disagree we offer this challenge: Simply turn off the "background" music when youth are studying, chatting, traveling or doing chores and observe their responses.

7.0 Uses and Gratifications of Popular Music

At the simplest, most global level, people of all ages listen to music because it provides **pleasure**. For adolescents especially, the pleasure can be intense and tends to be associated with the most intense, "peak" experiences of life.

Lull (1992, p. 1) stated that, "Music promotes experiences of the extreme for its makers and listeners, turning the perilous emotional edges, vulnerabilities, triumphs, celebrations, and antagonisms of life into hypnotic, reflective tempos that can be experienced privately or shared with others."

Given the importance of music and its central role in adolescence, it is clear that it has a number of important effects. Yet although there has been concern for decades about possible deleterious effects of popular music, for most children, the effects are not deleterious.

We will describe briefly three major uses: affective uses, social uses, and the uses of lyrics.

7.1 Affective Uses

The major difference between popular music and other media lies in music's ability to enhance or modify mood.

For most young people, music use is driven primarily by the motivation to control mood and enhance emotional states.

Music's ability to **communicate emotion** and **influence mood** has been widely noted. Even preschoolers and infants as young as eight months can reliably discriminate "happy" and "sad" music (Gentile & Pick, under review; Gentile, Pick, Flom, & Campos, 1994; Gentile, Stoerzinger, Finney, & Pick, 1996; Sullivan, Gentile, & Pick, 1998).

Because of the affective efficacy of music, when adolescents want to be in a certain mood, when they seek reinforcement for a certain mood, when they feel lonely, or when they seek distraction from their troubles, music tends to be the medium of choice to accomplish the task.

While both males and females report using music to affirm or manage their moods, there are some consistent differences in their goals.

Research shows that males are more likely than females to use music as a tool to increase their energy level and seek stimulation—that is, to get "pumped up."

In contrast, females are more likely than males to listen to lift their spirits when they're sad or lonely, or even to dwell on a somber mood (Arnett, 1991a; Larson, Kubey, & Colletti, 1989; Roe, 1985; Wells, 1990).

7.2 Social Uses

Some have suggested that while the emotional uses of popular music are important, the social uses and meanings provide the real key to understanding its niche in the lives of youth (Frith, 1981; Lull, 1987; Roe, 1984, 1985).

Solitary music listening may also perform a number of "delayed" social uses (Lull, 1987), by preparing youth for future peer interactions and relationships. There is a strong connection between interest in popular music and peer orientation.

In essence, music is used to create social circles and define socialization among the youth.

Those who can sing and dance to the latest songs are considered to be of a higher status than those who cannot, and this influences how young people interact and relate.

Social occasions may take various forms (Lull, 1987). In romantic dyads, music is used to accompany courtship and sexual behavior. In friendships, music often provides a basis for the initial bond, and often helps to maintain the relationship.

In larger gatherings, such as parties, dances, or clubs, music reduces inhibitions, attracts attention and approval, provides topics for conversation, and encourages dancing.

Music also works at a more diffuse social level to define the important subgroups in adolescent culture and to identify who belongs to them.

7.3 Uses of Music Lyrics

When asked why they like to listen to music, youth rarely list the lyrics as the main reason. Usually it is something about the “sound” of the music that attracts them.

However, lyrics are far from irrelevant—they are mentioned as a primary gratification by a significant number of youth and a secondary gratification by most (Gantz et al., 1978; Roe, 1985).

In one study (Rouner, 1990), high school students were asked to rank music against several other possible **sources of moral and social guidance**, including parents, teachers, friends, church leaders, and coworkers.

Sixteen percent ranked music among the top three sources of moral guidance, and 24 percent placed music in the top three for information on social interaction.

For better or worse, then, lyrics are often attended to, processed, discussed, memorized, and even taken to heart.

Given the controversy surrounding antisocial themes that are sometimes present in heavy metal and rap lyrics, it is important to note that heavy metal and rap fans report much higher levels of interest and attention to lyrics than do teens in general (Arnett, 1991a; Kuwahara, 1992).

Two general patterns seem to emerge from the research on attention to lyrics: First, the more important music is to an adolescent, the more importance he or she places on lyrics relative to other elements of music gratification.

Second, attention to lyrics is highest among fans of oppositional or controversial music (whether it be 1960s protest folk or rock or the heavy metal and rap of today). In other words, the more defiant, alienated, and threatening to the mainstream a music type is, the more closely its fans follow the words (Christenson & Roberts, 1998).

8.0 The Case of Kenyan Music

From the foregoing, the impact of music particularly on young people cannot be underscored further.

The past few years have witnessed increased complaints about the composition and delivery of most the local music which has been characterized by lewdness, vulgarity and profanities mostly centred on glorifying and glamorizing sex and the acts of it.

These songs seems not only to celebrate promiscuity, but in many instances denigrate women as objects of sex, while propagating the fallacy that men who thrive on sexual escapades are heroes of some sorts and are to be celebrated.

8.1 Offensive Stage Names

Some of the most popular Kenyan secular music artistes have very disgraceful and derogative stage names in their local languages that are not only attractive to the young people, but also grossly demeaning in context and nature. The kind of names that are mentioned and any sane adult will cringe in shame.

These names were found to cut across almost all communities in Kenya.

8.2 Profane and Obscene Lyrics & Song Titles

Some of the most popular songs in Kenya were identified to have extremely lewd and vulgar lyrics and song titles that cannot be played to general audiences during the watershed period.

Some of the songs evaluated have outright vulgarities mostly in indigenous languages, while others have implied meanings, which were established to be too general to even being deciphered by children.

8.3 Lewd Videos

A significant majority of the music videos reviewed contained grotesque and suggestive dancing styles, with some containing scenes of a man on top of a woman in bed, or touching her private parts, for instance

Majority of the music videos present dancers, especially the women, who are semi-nude, with extremely suggestive sexual gyrations, with occasional scenes of men bumping their crotches on them either from behind or the front.

9.0 The Effects of Obscene Music on Children, Youth and the Community

The research findings were not only shocking but in some instances outright distressing.

It was evident that on the one hand, parents, guardians and many other adults have continued to suffer the indignity of the indecent music in silence, lacking in ways of addressing the menace; while on the other hand a significant percentage of children and youth have been swallowed into near addiction to the lewd, vulgar, violent and obscene music that has dominated airwaves in Kenya.

Below are the (4) major effects of the music that were identified during the research:

9.1 Society Discomfort

Nothing is as traumatizing as a parent traveling with their teenage son or daughter in a *matatu* that is blaring obscene music. Worse is when the child or teen not only seems to enjoy the music, but sings along word to word, including some of the unprintable lyrics.

Most of this music has continued to generate angst and great discomfort to members of the community, given that the songs are played in public spaces during watershed hours, with the audience being a mixture of children, teenagers, youth and adults.

These songs are notoriously played loudly particularly in:

- passenger service vehicles (*matatus*),
- loud music shops in market centres,
- hotels, bars and restaurants and;
- social functions like weddings and funerals in the company of children.

It is traumatizing for most of the adults who are subjected to listening to these explicit songs without avenues for recourse, given the arrogance with which their complaints are treated with, especially by *matatu* crew.

9.2 Increased Promiscuity

Many parents, community leaders and administrators openly acknowledge increased sexual activity and promiscuity among school going children and teenagers, and irresponsible sexual behavior among young adults due to propagation of illicit sex by these musicians.

Over 50% of the songs sampled have sexual themes, from primal conquests for women to gory sexual details and nudity.

As it is outlined above on the uses and gratifications of music, erotic nature of these songs have had strong yet negative ramifications on the youth, a majority indulging in dangerous sexual exploits and pursuits just to “fit in” while others sinking into depression and similar circumstances for “being left out,”

9.3 Alcohol, Drugs and Substances Abuse

A significant majority of the songs reviewed openly showcase and glorify the use of alcohol, drugs and other substances including marijuana (bhang). These have continued to negatively impact on the young people, while frustrating government efforts to tame the same vices.

Given that these musicians are celebrities who are considered as role models by the youth, the desire to emulate them has pushed many youth into these vices, in the end destroying lives and causing huge economic losses to the community.

9.4 General Moral Decadence

The heavy presence of profanities and vulgarities in these songs which are extremely popular especially among children and the youth, have seen to the general decline of moral values among the youth.

A majority of them find these profanities to be cool and a status-statement, and it is now common to find youngsters using these same words on adults and their superiors.

This has contributed significantly to increased cases of indiscipline and declining education standards, since the music available to the youth does not inspire them to become better persons in society, but rather

10.0 Conclusion

From the baseline survey conducted, it is evident the infiltration of lewd, vulgar and violent music has already reached catastrophic levels in Kenya.

It is a common, yet depressing sight, to find children as young as six (6) years old loudly and proudly singing word-to-word of these profanities spewed in the name of music.

Parents and society in general are desperate and exasperated, and are direly seeking intervention and reprieve from the government.

11.0 Recommendations

The continued public outcry over these songs and videos cannot be ignored anymore. The control of their production, distribution and consumption squarely falls under the expanded mandate of the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB). It is therefore recommended as follows:

1. Ban the complete playing of the songs listed herein (Appendix I) in ALL public spaces during watershed hours that run from 5:00 am – 10:00 pm. (A comprehensive list with the direct/implied interpretations is being compiled and reviewed by the Board against the existing Laws)
2. Ban the complete use of the said vulgar and/or inappropriate stage names and require the artistes in question to publicly recall and denounce them, including productions previously disseminated to the public.
3. Provide law enforcement agencies with a verified list of the banned songs and/or videos with the clear mandate to arrest and charge those flouting the ban in accordance with the Law.
4. Conduct an elaborate public awareness and sensitization campaign on the banned stage names, music and videos, and provide hotline numbers to report incidences of persons failing to comply with the direction of the Board.
5. Commission a comprehensive and continuous research to unearth ALL the offending songs and/or videos in all the languages in Kenya, with a specific focus on the effects the songs have had on children, youth and the society in general particularly on their socialization, culture, morals and values.
6. Organize and Facilitate a National Stakeholders Forum to deliberate on the above issues, with the view of drawing up a national policy to control and regulate recording and production of songs and/or videos in future. This forum should draw producers, recording studios, promoters, marketers, media houses, sectoral leaders (religious, political, civil society) other regulators (e.g. the Communications Authority), and other agencies (e.g. NACADA, NCIC, etc).