

CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE PRACTICE OF DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM IN STATE AND PRIVATE MEDIA IN ETHIOPIA

Tesfaye Bezabih Gezihagne*

Abstract

The use of development journalism in Ethiopia media leaves a wide gap between its knowledge and practice.

This paper analysis the challenges which affect the practice of development journalism in the Ethiopian state and privately-owned media. It proceeds from the thesis that investigating the prospects and challenges of developmental journalism in state and privately owned newspapers in Ethiopia.

The researcher employed a descriptive design in which both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from relevant sources. The *Ethiopian Herald* and *The Reporter* newspapers from the state and the private media respectively are the most prominent and readable newspapers in Ethiopia. The researcher purposively selected the newspapers based on media ownership and readability. The researcher also used an interview and a focus group discussion with the journalists whom were chosen purposively the journalists.

As the findings of the study, having various interests between the media houses in developing news stories non-institutionalization of development journalism in the private media house, commercial imperative in making the newspaper as a business entity, urbanized nature of development journalism, lack of specialized training to the journalists, journalists' lack of commitments were considered as the main challenges of development journalism which are prevailed in both state and private media in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Development journalism, journalists, privately owned-media, State-owned media.

* **Department of Mass communication, Assam University, India, PhD Scholar**

Introduction

Development journalism is a section of journalism that spotlights on the accomplishment of positive development results in a community. It aims in mobilizing diverse development actors to outline and carry out development strategies and policies that yield shared advantages to all. Development journalism has been received with blended emotions from various fronts and societies. Its applicability in various development stages has been addressed by other journalism theories and practices.

Scholars revealed that development media theory emerges from the conviction that media people in Third World, anti-colonial, and post-frontier societies work with unique sets of realities and are required to assume certain roles that are alien to the standards of Western media frameworks (Rao & Lee, 2005).

Researchers stated that development journalism is seen as an ‘alternative journalism’ which is a broad and comparative phrase that clinches not only “journalisms of politics and empowerment”, but also “those of popular culture and the everyday” as it is also basically centers around national improvement particularly in the underdeveloped nations. Development journalism may not be new, but it is still in its infant stage in Ethiopia media context since it has not yet embraced its potentialities.

It is obviously clear that many African, Asian and Latin American countries are giving paramount importance on development journalism as it has lots of attractions for these underdeveloped nations. In nations where impoverishment is the norm, the countries governments’ needs and wants as much help as it can get. Government can probably have to take decisions which are based on the common good but which harm individual liberties. These result might be exceptionally disesteemed, however, they must be taken, and a hostile press can keep down government's amelioration while a strong press can support the government push these policies ahead.

Although various countries are amplifying the fundamental importance of development journalism, they could not deny the presence of various factors which inhibit its absolute

gumption. Both journalists and the nation media share the constraints which affect the good use of development journalism.

The pitfalls in development approach can be seen through an alternate points of views. As the press is existing in this dynamic world, it ends up far less critical and ultimately is compelled to stop its "watchdog" part in the public arena. As it consistently panders to the government, the media loses its basic edge and turns out to be just government mouthpiece.

At the point when this happens, it prepares for a destructive underground or alternative press with a solid hostile to government approach. This occurs most by opposition party forming up a resistance medium to scrutinize the government. As the press endeavors to advance the government and the benefit of all, it can begin to dismiss the individual and the person's human rights. On the off chance that fundamentally inspected, it would be found that development journalism can be compared with one in which the government practices tight control also, anticipates freedom of expression, all balance the name of honorable closures.

Therefore, in this study, some of the challenges which affect journalists that hinder them so as not to appropriately and fully practice development journalism in Ethiopia are discussed. Journalists who are working both in the state and private media were asked to reflect on the factors affecting the undertaking of development journalism practices, and they have analyzed several matters. For instance:

Development journalism of times faces issues as low proficient journalistic yardsticks and commitments, an absence of monetary assets, work specialized competencies and aptitudes divided legal structures and an undemocratic political system Odugbemi, S. & Norris, P. (2010).

Additionally, there is danger of support the media will most likely be unable to break free from its political limitations and may work as per clientelism or be caught by private interests. Ethiopia's press is today being looked with various difficulties and these difficulties are hindrances to development reporting among these are:

Various Interests' between State and Private media

The media emphasizes on “what people want to read” and development stories are not what the majority of people are interested in reading according to the focus group discussants in the previous chapters (FGD). The Ethiopian Press Agency in general and the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper section in particular want to publish development stories without bias and dramatization. Yet, newspapers driven by market forces on the other hand do not want well researched development stories for obvious reasons. According to the focus group discussant (FGD) of *The Reporter* newspaper, stories that do cover the plight of the societies are being well covered by their newspaper other than of certain promotional deeds. But, they do have a big interest to clearly show the country’s development in the political, social and economic sectors (FGD, December 2017).

The reason behind this shows that either there is more importance given to politics or to readers who find development stories boring. Also there are not enough motivated journalists to take up the issues and in case they do, the editors and reporters may not be interested. Besides, as the newspapers is a commercial one many of the news makers focus on current issues and issues which take the reader’s attention. “Directly or indirectly the reader’s preferences are known by many of us, hence serious attention is given on the matter on the spot and the news and programs are circulating around responsive political issues” (FGD). On the matter, the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper discussants uttered that as they stand to promote the country’s growth and transformation progress whether they like it or not, it is a must to write developmental activities in their both Amharic and English language versions of newspapers. Likewise, they added, “As our editorial policy too is designed to sell our good deeds to the audiences/readers, we often engage on promotional activities.” (FGD, December 2017).

Non-institutionalization of Development Journalism

Development journalism is not institutionalized. Under the study, it is found that development journalism was not an institutional concept and was not clearly articulated in the editorial policy of *The Reporter* newspaper. However, in the *Ethiopian Herald* media-which is under the Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA), the concept of development journalism is partly institutionalized

despite its practicality is vague. Development journalism has given some part on the editorial policy despite not fully institutionalized due to so many factors.

The researcher has got some chances to avail himself on the editorial meeting of the state media *Ethiopian Herald* and he observed some shared views on what their day today activities need to be, what tasks do journalists and reporters take as far as the government media is concerned. The meeting is primarily focused on amplifying some success stories and almost it talked about some issues that the journalists should carry out the public relations job. Meanwhile, events were the main news activities in which every journalist should take part. Promoting the country's growth and development activities are also the pillar for their news framing. However, promoting deliberation – i.e. serious dialogues – among the people, and between the people and their supervisors at different levels, which emerges as the journalist facilitates conversation among communities of people were not institutionalized.

Besides, the journalists have great concern over the planning procedure institutionally. They said that they rarely plan their stories and get consultations over inputs in the plan. The plan is prepared either by the editorial team together or by the news section coordinator and distributed to them. Some of them even complained that proposals they presented for approval would be given to somebody and they take another in return and that it leads them to lose enthusiasm for the task they are accredited to. The underlying reason according to the reporters is the attempt of bosses to avoid any preplanned attachment with sources of information.

In the private newspaper also noted those instances where the newspaper made efforts to cover development news, such coverage was not informed by any theoretical or conceptual framework. Rather development news was revealed like some other news and customary or traditional sort of news values of conspicuousness and newsworthiness supported publication of any development news story.

Commercial Imperative

Unlike the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper, the *Reporter* newspaper existed as a business entity. It had a commercial aim of making profits. For it to make benefits, it needed to pitch to reader and

sponsors and push printed copy dealers. Hence, development news agendas may not be treated separately and also not given too much attention on the newspaper.

As to an interview with a chief (Deputy Editor) of *The Reporter* newspaper, he stated:

Development journalism does not sell, it is for this reason that we are not also focusing on development issues, but do not forget that we have various and deep analysis of development reporting on the Millennium Development Goals of the country like GTPI and GTPII Plans and strategies (Health, education, poverty reduction, investment, urbanization, industrialization) and others which are mostly portrayed in our weekly editions. But, I do not know whether the readers are fond of reading news regarding the above development news or not. But, I guess, readers are more attracted by taught provoking views of politics and some current issues than development oriented news (RNPR, 2 December 2017).

Another respondent added that the political news overrode development journalism because currently the country has been politically unstable due to different ethnical conflicts, abuse of power, lack of good governance and so forth so that some political news are the most attention seeking ones which the readers are fond of reading and we too are giving them much emphasis (RNPR7, December 2017).

Besides, another respondent stated that since advertising is our means of income to our newspaper, we have given a lot space for advertisement. Advertising has almost always been on the increasing trend for *The Reporter* newspaper which indicates that it has been an opportunity for the media house (RNPR 4, December 2017).

Hence, it appears more the case that the newspaper institutions in general were less interested to provide the public with more and more information or news. In other words, it could be noted that their motive has been more of making profit than to provide information that the public needed to make an informed decision.

Access of Specialized Training

Journalists' practical incompetence has been widely attributed to the depth of their prior professional trainings. Certainly, their understandings of the fundamental views and essences of the practice of development journalism manipulates their pragmatic performance.

For instance, a respondent from the state –*Ethiopian Herald* newspaper said:

From the beginning, development (al) journalist must develop contextual understanding of the practice of development journalism the one that should go with the country. I don't think it is understood with this angle, I believe they should know to report on both failures and complaints of the public (EHNPR 3, November 2017)

Lack of this professional value could highly affect their practical commitment. In fact, they are slightly made to consider development journalism simply a tool for advocating government policies and strategies.

A veteran journalist from the *Ethiopian Herald* stated about the professional ineffectiveness of development journalists as:

From my extensive stay here in the press, I have observed that several journalists' lack the commitment to excavate the core issue they went for. This can be related to both professional knowledge and practical engagements. I think they need to internalize the profession. These days, there is a wide spread of journalism education. That is a big opportunity to get trained in the actual field. Yet, I don't think that journalists are reflecting their trainings in the real practice. (EHNPR5, November 2017).

However, some media people believe that each failure might not be associated with the lack of prior trainings. Development journalists' level of curiosity in applying already acquired skills sought another emphasis. We have got lack of some journalistic skills, but most serious is that we do not put in to practice even what we have known. For instance, we don't make any sort of preparation or plan for our reports (EHNPR8, November 2017).

A respondent from *The Reporter* newspaper disclosed his point, “Regarding development journalism so far no training comes to our media house and almost the majority of us have not got skill based training on how to report, write or develop news with development journalism model, yet we are using our own prior understanding when we want to write development news stories” (RNPR, 6 December 2017).

This insufficiency of specialization had implied that both the media houses did not exhaustively articulate development journalism and copiously cover huge numbers of the nation's GTPII plan and Millennium Development Goals. Besides, no journalism curriculum is designed and given for journalism discipline students who are graduated in universities. As graduates are out of the college, it is expected that they will apply for jobs either for private or government and then are going to be employed without having a good understanding and knowledge of development journalism. At least there should be a specialized training on the theories and principle of development journalism, however, this has not yet been fully addressed by their media house so far (EHNPR 5, December 2017).

Shah(1990)as cited in ObengQuaidoo(1988) remarked that the level of development news reported requests on the levels of training journalist's get; he set up that journalists who receive special training on issues for instance rural development health, population and societal issues tend to cover a high extent of stories overseeing such matters . Obeng-Quaidoo referred to journalism researchers Walter Lippmann who underscored the requirement for specialization consequently:

Nor very writer of each newspaper thinks to know about or could see every one of the exercises of humanity. Be that as it may, there are a few writers, had practical experience in many subjects, who must be cautioned to vital developments of even the most specific exercises. For this, the calling of reporting is getting to be specific. The journalist is getting to be liable to the impulse to regard and watch the scholarly trains and the sorted out collection of learning which the pro in any field possesses. (Obeng- Quaidoo, 1988, p.12).

Thus, on job training is another hindrance for journalists which inhibits them from practicing development journalism appropriately. However, the editor-in-chief of the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper said that the journalists are given training occasionally on development journalism in a package of training prepared on government policies. He also admits that journalists need intensive training and updating on the subject. A few of the journalists have said they neither have taken development courses from the formal schooling classes nor did receive any formal training ever since (EHNPR1, December 2017). Similarly, the editor-in-chief of *The Reporter* newspaper stated that they have not got and no media practitioners has gone and gave a short or long term training for the journalists' and reporters to their media house, rather it is their prior little understanding and general knowledge which helped them to write development articles or news accordingly (RNPR 1, December 2017).

More or less the journalists in the *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper have got little training on the matter, on the other hand *The Reporter* newspaper journalists did not have any professional training on development journalism or development reporting and this might also create a discrepancy in between them with regard to the understanding and practices of development journalism in Ethiopia.

Urbanized nature of Development Journalism and Journalists

Literatures stated that development journalism mainly focuses on rural areas coverage, yet journalists and media practitioners mainly give emphasis for development agendas near to urban sites. The urbanized facet of development media and the scarcity of sufficient transportation to cover remote areas has prompted the moderate appropriation of development journalism. Development journalism requires journalists to travel to rural areas to interact with people affected and in the process gaining an enormous range of development visions plus, 'how to' bits of knowledge (Galtung and Vincent, 1992). Dixit (1993) in Tshabangel Thulani (2013), former Regional Director for Asia-Pacific of the Inter Press Service (IPS) composed an inner reminder to his staff that development journalism wasn't possible for all intents and purposes while sitting in one's fancy and cooled office. He added that development reporting means travel and could not be done overnight on one of those sudden deadlines. Freier (2001) contemplated that expanding urbanization have prompted an under portrayal of the provincial zones in journalism.

The above analysis seems quite true for a country like Ethiopia where agriculture is the backbone and the main source of the country's economy. This specific part decides the development of every single other segment and thus, the entire national economy. The region tilted by the Ethiopian small scale farmer constituted 95% of the entire area under rural utilized and these agrarians are in charge of in excess of 90 % of the total country farm yield . Moreover, the second GTP of the country along with the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam(GRD) requires passion and courage to go far and stay for long time and report the development issues in in-depth and comprehensive manner constantly despite the matter is a more tiresome activity. Respondents from both media houses revealed that lack of transport access, poor infrastructure and vast distances and lack of budget to cover moredevelopmental issues in agricultural sector inhibits them to go far in their media work. And their development reporting work is mostly float in covering some urban activities.

Journalists' Commitment

Commitment is one of the ethical requirements for any professional engagements and every profession has its own ethical requirements. When it comes to journalists, commitment is one of the basic necessities in the ethics of the profession. In this study, it was observed that being committed in any sort of profession is necessary so as to achieve the planed goal, respondents in the *Ethiopian Herald* news room also seemed less committed to accept and fulfil the tasks which are given by their political appointed bosses. "Commitment goes with purpose. Why do you work if you don't have something to achieve?" said one of the reporters in *Ethiopian Herald*. He said he wouldn't expect any change in life being a member of the newsroom. According to this reporter, there must be motivational atmosphere to evoke commitment. "The working environment is always dull; no progress at all. Well, currently, our salary is increased. It is good though the living condition here in Addis is tough. Why should I bother about critical reporting when it has nothing to contribute to my career in the news room freedom", he said. In the discussions made with the journalists, most of *The Reporter* newspaper journalists explained that commitment of journalists is below expectation due to the fact that rewarding or demoting mechanisms are not yet in place. As the media is guided by the civil service regulation of the country, there is no motivational mechanism for journalists who would like to commit themselves. "Journalism is not passion nor is it a virtue in this country. You come to it by chance

and live in it by chance. If the chance leaves you forever in it, you will remain impoverished all your life. Commitment must result in change of your soul or life” said one senior journalist (EHNPR,4 November 2017).

However, many of the respondents in the private-*The Reporter* revealed that they are wholly committed to what they are doing. There might be field reporting on events or another societal or governmental issues. They are dedicated enough to make ready and satisfactory their work to their readers with love and passion. They told the researcher, their salary is more satisfactory and would not complain about that though there is invisible control which triggers them to serve the government as a propaganda machine and warn them to do that to do this.

External challenges

Here, external factors refer to the factors that deter journalists from developmental reporting such as access to information and unavailability of database.

Among the external factors which inhibit the journalists to fully put through development journalism is limitation for accessing essential information. This is a big impediment to their journalistic activities which creates the unwillingness of sources to release information. This is very serious in both the private and state media houses according to the journalists’ focus group discussions.

Information is not properly released and given by the direct and concerned channels. Sometimes we can say that it is up to the politicians will and preference of the media channels in which the news are released primarily. Usually, the organizations want to give out information only when they want publicity through their PR departments. Instead of providing information causally or regularly they want to talk much when they are well prepared on issues that interest them; not necessarily in light of a legitimate concern for the media, as per reporters.(FGD, December 2017)

Experts are not also comfortable with media for fear that their bosses reprimand them or take some action against them, the journalists comment. Experts usually shy away from giving

information or talk to journalists because they believe that only PR officers are entitled to providing information. They relate this problem to proclamation No. 590/2008 of Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information that empowers PR officers to give public information than anybody else in the public sector. However, the PR officers have neither deep knowledge of issues nor do they provide organized data about the issues since the boss in then institution or in any sector does not give full privilege to the PRS so as to entertain the flow of information freely and independently (FGD, December 2017).

In line with the difficulty in accessing information, accessing to a framed and well organized data can also be taken as another constraint for the journalists not to implement development journalism practice properly. Many journalists in both media camps noted that the difficulty of finding well organized data in both government and non-government organizations. The problem is not only unavailability of data, according to the journalists. The difficulty is that the data are scattered in different offices and that they are referred to different persons to find out minor facts about the institutions they cover. They also noted that tracing documents and databases take time even when the appropriate persons and offices are identified(FGD, December 2017).

Conclusions

In this chapter, the researcher assessed some of the challenges which affect both the state and privately owned media journalists in rehearsing development journalism in Ethiopia. Those constraints were illustrated based on the respondent's views in the interview and focus group discussion sessions during the data collection stage. Besides, the researcher also shared his observational perspective in the content analysis of the two selected newspapers.

Development journalists are under serous deficiency of the fundamental knowledge and skills of development journalism. They have not yet internalized the critical features of the practice. There is no pragmatic emphasis given to development journalism specialization although there is some kind of consensus in the media concerning its essence. Besides, in the course of realizing the notion of development journalism, journalistic incompetence remained a prominent challenge. In most cases, development reporting is criticized for lack of creativity, inadequate

background research, little understanding of the theory by both the media managers and some incompetent journalists, and heavy reliance on official statistics and officials' phrases.

References

- [1]Freier R. (2001). Towards an Integrated Media Support Strategy for (English Speaking) Sub-Saharan Africa. Bonn: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.
- [2]Galtung, J. & Vincent, R. C. (1992). *Global glasnost: Towards a new world information and communication order?* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc.
- [3]Obeng-Quaidoo, I. 1988. Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Journalistic Expression in Africa: The Case of Ghana. *Africa Media Review*, ZVol. 2(2). Nairobi: African Council on Communication Education. Available from <http://www.archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/.../pdfs/.../vol2no2/jamr002002007.pdf> [Accessed 2017 July 23.
- [4]Odugbemi, S.& Norris, P. (2010).Assessing the Extent to Which the News Media Act as Watchdogs, Agenda Setters, and Gatekeepers. In Norris, Pippa (Ed.) *Public Sentinel: News Media &Governance Reform*. USA. The World Bank. Washington, D.C.
- [5]Proclamation No. 590. (2008) Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information.
- [5]Rao, S., & Lee, S. T. (2005). Globalizing media ethics? An assessment of universal ethics among international political journalists. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*,20 (2&3), 99–120.
- [7]Shah, H. (1990). Factors influencing development news production at three Indian dailies. *Journalism Quarterly* 67 (4), 1034–1041.
- [8]Tshabangu, T. (2013). Development Journalism in Zimbabwe: Practice, Problems, and Prospects. *Journal of Development and Communication Studies* 2(2–3), 312–328.