

**MEDIA AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE HORN OF
AFRICA: IMPERATIVES TO TRANSFORM RHETORIC
TO REALITY IN ETHIOPIA**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that Ethiopian broadcast and print media institutions play in promoting good governance and the constraints the media encounter in discharging their responsibility. Informed by development journalism model, the study set out to answer two basic research questions raised to guide the research procedure. Qualitative method was employed to gather the relevant data to answer the questions. Journalists and media managers from the government/ public and the private print and electronic media were considered as sources of data. The data obtained through questionnaire and interviews were analyzed thematically. The finding of the study indicated that despite the rhetoric about the government's determination to fight good governance problems and promote sustainable development and democratization, there are discrepancies between media institutions' perceived roles and actual practices in addressing the rising corruption and rent-seeking problems in the country. There are attempts to address the problem through educational programs and disseminating anti-corruption information; however, the practice of investigative reporting with a bid to expose corruption and abuse of power was found to be insignificant when compared to the problem. A number of factors including lack of attention to investigative journalism, unauthorized political interference and journalists and professional-related problems among others were identified as constraints to practicing investigative reporting as a means to curb the good governance problems in the country.

Key words: Ethiopia, development, good governance, development journalism, investigative reporting

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I. Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the quest for *development* has served as the ‘lead star’ in orienting domestic and foreign policies and actions of developing countries. With the social scientists from the superpowers of the Cold War offering different development models to the ‘Third World’, media of mass communication have emerged as key players in national development endeavor basically with the capitalist development-oriented modernization paradigm. Gradually, with the immense power of the electronic media, enhanced by the advent of computer and satellite technologies, media have assumed central position in the political, economic and socio-cultural activities of societies in the developing world, where majority of the citizenry suffer from undesirable socio-economic and political conditions (Melkote, 2001; Murthy, 2006).

Though the early attempts of using the media for national development as advanced by theorists of modernization have failed to serve the right purpose, the media maintained their key position in development discourse especially since the 1990s with the spread of democracy in developing countries and emergence of good governance as the latest remedy to development challenges (Nedlela, 2009; Grugel, 2002; Abrahamson, 2000).

In Ethiopia, where poverty has been declared the number one enemy, for example, since the early 1990s introduction of democratic rule to the country, the government has adopted successive long-term and short-term development plans to extricate the people out of poverty through socioeconomic and political transformation. As development and democracy have become the question of life and death, the media are entrusted with the role of promoting development, democracy and good governance and a *development media role* has been embraced (FDRE 1995 Constitution, Draft Media Policy Document, 2008, 2015). Besides, the Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression and of the press, recognizing the role of independent media in consolidating democratic governance.

With regard to good governance, the government has formulated decentralization policy aimed at devolving governmental power from the center to the regional states and then to the district and local level to empower the grassroots to participate in development and democratization process. Moreover, it established different institutions such as Omdurman, Human Right Commission,

and Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission which operates under the motto “Fighting corruption is fighting poverty.” Nevertheless, prevailing corruption, rent-seeking behavior and erosion of accountability seem to be threatening the promising development trends in Ethiopia. Various cases in urban land mismanagement and grand corruption in government institutions including Ethiopian Revenues and Customs Authority and others as well as in the private sector have led to a growing public discontent even after reelecting the incumbent in May 2015. This has forced the government to launch a campaign against the mounting good governance problems where Primer Halemariam Dessalegn called up on media institutions to revitalize investigative reporting (EBC, December 2015).

Indeed, media can play preventive and curative roles in such a context and can promote development as demonstrated by the experiences of many developing countries, notably in Asia and few African countries. However, it is important to note that the power of the media in accomplishing these responsibilities is not always a problem free, implying that it is imperative to examine the journalistic practices in a country like Ethiopia where rent-seeking and corruption is competing with the fast growing economy.

II. The Interplay between Development, Good Governance and Media

2.1. The Concept of good governance

Scholars agree that development as a multidimensional process is freedom from prison of economic poverty, political tyranny, sickness and disease, ignorance, and oppression and violence” (Tony Blair in Crown Copyright 2006). This concerns democratization, i.e. “political change moving in a democratic direction” (Potter 2000, p 368). In Ethiopian context, for example, development is understood as empowerment of the people in every aspect of life which cannot be achieved without good governance (Sen, 1999) as cited in Bahiru and Pausewang, 2002).

The compatibility of holistic development with good governance is plausible argument because “development and prosperity are not possible under conditions of legal insecurity, disregard for human rights, poorly functioning administration and corruption” (BMZ, 2012, p.5). Literatures on development address the issue of governance as crucial component. Governance, in a

broadest sense, is about who has influence, who decides, and how decision-makers are held accountable. Governance is about power, relationships and accountability. It refers to the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken on issues of particular importance, how citizens or other stakeholders have their say (World Bank (2005, UNDP Ethiopia, 2012). It is through governance that citizens voice their interests and exercise their legal rights and obligations (UNESCO (2005).

Good governance is regarded as sound development management and the capability of the state to perform its key functions in response to its citizens' aspirations and needs. It aims at fighting corruption, upholding the rule of law, accountability, institutional pluralism, participation and the guarantees of the civil and human rights and effective participation among others (Potter 2000, Aveggi, 2010). The essence of good governance is thus greater efficiency and rationality in resource allocation, an enabling environment, and lack of corruption. Its key features are transparency, accountability, institutional pluralism, participation, the rule of law, and the guarantees of the civil and human rights needed for effective participation (Ibid).

As to Mason, et al. (1994), transparency refers to public access to knowledge of the policies and strategies of a government and involves making public accounts verifiable, providing for public participation in government policy-making and implementation, and allowing contestation over decisions impacting on the lives of citizens. It also includes making available for public scrutiny accurate and timely information on economic, financial and market conditions. As to McQuail (2008), accountability can be understood as holding responsible elected or appointed individuals and organizations charged with a public mandate to account for specific actions, activities or decisions to the public from which they derive their authority. When both transparency and accountability operate interdependently in governance there would be possibility for irresponsible and incompetent leaders to vote out of office for failure in management of the economy and other matters.

The rule of law is also a vital element of good governance compatible with development. In a pro-governance and pro-development legal and judicial system, the laws are clear, uniformly applied through objective and independent judiciary, and provide the necessary sanctions to deter or penalize breach (Potter, 2000; Ronning, 2009). At the absence of transparency, accountability

and rule of law the spread of corruption and maladministration is inevitable. Therefore, promoting good governance concerns fighting corruption. Generally defined, corruption refers to the misappropriation of public assets, public office or trust for private gains. In other words, it is the abuse of public power for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. It occurs at the intersection of public and private sectors, when public office is abused by an official accepting, soliciting, or extorting a bribe (Stapenhurst, 2000, Transparency International, 2008).

Where there is widespread corruption, economic, social and democratic developments would be seriously threatened because it undermines democracy and good governance by flouting formal processes. It reduces accountability, compromises the rule of law in the judiciary; results in the unfair provision of services in public administration; erodes the institutional capacity of government and challenges economic development by generating considerable distortions and inefficiency in public and private sectors. Fighting corruption is, therefore, an essential quality of good governance that requires the commitment of government agencies and active role of institutions like media (UNECA, 2004; BBC World Service Trust Report, 2009).

Rent-seeking, i.e. “an attempt to obtain economic rent by manipulating the social or political environment in which economic activities occur, rather than by creating new wealth” has become a catchword in contemporary government discourse in Ethiopia as another replica of corruption Befikadu (2012). In the views of the late Primer Meles Zenawi, one of the problems with Ethiopia’s development effort is rent-seeking, greedy individuals and groups in the leadership and corrupt businesses elites, labeled as “government thieves and private robbers.” In the special realities of Ethiopia, as an emerging democratic developmental state, government institutions are the sanctuary for public corruption and the government has started running a campaign against the problem.

2.2. Nexus between Media and Good Governance

The nexus between media and good governance is best defined in relation to development journalism model. Informed by the ideals of participatory development communication, in terms of the general role entrusted to the media, development journalism upholds that the media have

to play active role in promoting multidimensional development (Skjerdal 2009, Banda, 2006). Development journalists are intellectually and professionally engaged so as to rally the people behind development efforts. According to Banda (2006, p.5), development journalism is “an intellectual enterprise in which the journalist form a kind of free intelligence and should critically examine the aims of national development and the applicable instruments in a rational discourse and solve them by reasonable criteria free of social constraints.”

Murthy (2006) also argues that development journalism is not different from investigative reporting. A development journalist should critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between its impacts on people as claimed by the government officials and as it actually is. It is not synonymous with officially prepared handouts, so-called positive news. Further in his later work, Murthy (2010, p.35) asserts that good development journalism is characterized by comprehensive coverage of important subjects in socioeconomic activities and “exposure of incompetence and indifference of government officials while tackling corruption in government can change policies, besides saving government money. Conversely, bad journalism is misinformation which fails to report news or reporting depthless, inaccurate and unfair news leaving people dangerously uninformed.”

It is important to note that the key concept in the definition of development journalism is investigative reporting which is an important instrument to enforce good governance. According Spark (1999, p.6) “investigative reporting seeks to gather facts which someone wants suppressed. It seeks not just the obvious informants who will be uncontroversial or economical with the truth, but the less obvious who know about disturbing secrets and are angry or disturbed enough to divulge them.” In conclusion, scholars underline that the media such as newspapers, radio, television, online and social media can help in promoting good governance in various ways:

➤ Free media in democracy serves as an element of check and balances and can help in promoting protection of human rights;

- By way of freedom of information and free access to information media promotes a culture of political pluralism and social dialogue and forms an informed, empowered and participant citizenry;
- As watchdog of public interest, by giving publicity to economic and social shortcomings, the media contribute to democracy and good governance;
- The media can be used as channel of instruction of citizens and the delivery of educational content as they serve as informal schooling in every citizens home.
- The media can serve as instrument of exerting political influence that reinforces government accountability and responsiveness;
- The media can raise public awareness about corruption, its causes, consequences and possible remedies; investigates possible incidents of corruption (BMZ 2012; Stapenhurst, 2000).

III. Objective, research questions and methods of the Study

3.1. Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to assess the role of the media in promoting good governance, notably ensuring accountability and curbing corruption in Ethiopia. It also attempts to identify challenges facing the media in discharging their responsibilities.

In an attempt to achieve the objective, the study intends to answer the following basic questions:

1. How are the practices of the Ethiopian media in promoting good governance and development described?
2. What factors obstruct Ethiopian media from promoting good governance and development in the country?

3.2. Methods of the study

The study employed descriptive design where by qualitative data were gathered from relevant sources. The data were obtained from journalists and media managers of the federal government (EBC or former ERTA, ENA and EPA) and regional states media institutions (Oromia, Amhara, Addis Ababa City Government and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) and private press (The Reporter and Addis Admas newspapers) based in Addis Ababa. Accordingly, 200 journalists, 10 media managers of the media institutions participated as data sources for the study. The data for the present analysis were drawn from the comprehensive study the

researcher recently conducted on the role of media and communication for development and democratization in Ethiopia where media and good governance has been treated as one major element of the study. Open-ended questionnaire and interview were employed as data gathering tools. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically and discussion and conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the data.

IV. Findings of the Study

4.1. Media Practices in Promoting Good Governance

The making of new Ethiopia is ongoing since the early 1990s. The FDRE government, by embracing the new development journalism model in principle, has encouraged the media to serve as partners in promoting development, democracy and good governance which are all interdependent to realize holistic national development. The government has heavily invested on the development of media institutions basically government funded broadcast media at federal and regional state level. Currently, almost all regional state governments have their own media agency. Decentralization of media with a clear purpose of empowering the people, particularly the grassroots can be regarded as the first phase to the practice of democratic developmental media in the country. Expanding media institutions, particularly broadcast media, enable large population living in remote areas to get access to information. Moreover, when media institutions get closer to the people in their language, the people can easily express their development problem and the media can also easily gather information from the public to give them proper coverage. In this regard, the regional radio and television agencies and the expanding federal media outlets as well as the initiatives in establishing community radios are worth mentioning. The print media sector is also in the game, though limited in their circulation to the big towns and readership is challenged by socioeconomic constraints. However, expanding media outlets and giving coverage may not be the only solution to the current good governance and development problems but what to report and how to report also matter greatly.

The present study found that the surveyed journalists in the Ethiopian media institutions are well aware of their roles in promoting good governance without which development cannot be realized. The media practitioners and the managers of government media perceive their roles in promoting development as the greatest priority whereas those working for the private press

declined to attribute their roles merely to promoting development, rather identifying themselves with doing what the profession dictates.

When it comes to practices in promoting good governance which is the central question of the present study, there are indicators of journalistic efforts in tackling the problem as part of development journalism practices. In almost all the government media institutions at federal and regional levels there are programs devoted to addressing good governance issues. Best examples are from EBC, formerly ERTA's *Aynachin/ Fitlefit* now renamed as 'Asash' and similar special programs on good governance issues in Oromia Radio and Television Organization, Amhara Mass Media Agency and Debub Mass Media Agency. These programs have the objectives of ensuring accountability of public officials in discharging their responsibilities. However, contrary to the principles of development journalism and the roles of media in enforcing good governance and in the face of the widespread corruption and rent-seeking behaviors in Ethiopia, the actual practices of these media are found to be lacking.

In reality, issues related to urban land mismanagement and spreading corruption and abuse of power in different sectors have not been addressed properly. Journalists do not proactively investigate corruption and maladministration; rather they are preoccupied with reporting actions taken by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and other government agencies. The finding showed that the media's role in promoting good governance was limited to information and education on the effect of corruption, as a preventive role, rather than investigating corruption to enforce accountability as a curative role of the media. This may be commendable initiative, however, it is important to note that promoting good governance does not mean simply telling people to behave well or be a good citizen. It also means investigating mismanagement and abuses of power, disclosing corruption and scandals, enforcing the rule of law, transparency and accountability of government officials and private actors, creating public forum for free debate and exchange of opinions, providing unbiased, quality, complete and timely information to the public.

In the contrary, however, some government media journalists and managers seem to misunderstand promoting good governance as merely telling people to be good citizens that hate

corruption. Moreover, they tend to equate investigative and critical reporting to opposing government policies or siding with opposition political parties, which is not necessarily the case. If understood properly, investigative reporting is part and parcel of development journalism which the Ethiopian government has formally accepted as the best journalism model. In other words, the media practices lack important elements of good governance. The study also revealed that private and government media have different self-concept in this respect. The private media journalists claimed better practice in promoting good governance, arguing from the logic that they cannot sell their newspapers unless they address sensitive good governance problems in the country. The government media practitioners and managers, on the other hand, admitted that they have not done well in addressing good governance problems as expected of them but still claim better performance compared to private press which they accuse as sensationalist and irresponsible.

It was also found that Ethiopian government media practices heavily relayed on success stories at the expense of tackling good governance problems. This seems to contradict even with the government media institutions' editorial policy which obliges the media to serve not only the government in power, but also demands that the media have the obligation to broaden public understanding of democratic principles, rights and freedom, promote public participation in democracy, check whether government officials perform their duties in accordance with democratic principle and let the public know about it, expose corruption, promote transparency and accountability.

The government media's predominant dependence on government authorities and government news agencies as information sources is also a living witness to the limitations of promoting good governance in the present scenario. Government media journalists who participated in the present study reported that the government officials, both at federal and regional state level, are their main source of information for reporting and they rarely verify the truthfulness of the information they get from government sources, taking their credibility for granted. Although government is regarded as partner in development process, the Ethiopian government media practices not only violates the ethical guideline provided in the government media institutions'

editorial policy but also contradicts the principle of development journalism which values investigative reporting and people's participation in development process.

According to the finding, instead of addressing the real causes of the problems, media managers tend to make journalists partly responsible for poor performance whereas journalists blame the media managers and lack of legal protection for investigative reporters as impediments to professional journalistic practices. On attempting to examine possible reasons behind the limitations witnessed in the practices of Ethiopian media in promoting good governance, the researcher posed questions to the participants of the study and identified various challenges constraining journalistic efforts in the media institutions under study. The identified challenges are presented briefly under the next section.

4.2. Challenges Facing the Media in Promoting Good governance

In any country, journalism affects the economy, politics and sociocultural conditions of the land, and is in turn influenced by these factors in various ways. In Ethiopia, too, journalism practices are subject to both internal and external challenges of different sorts among which the spectacular ones, according to the present study, are the following.

- **Less attention to investigative reporting, and finance and logistics problems:** Media industry cannot operate on its own but needs financial backing so as to be effective. One of the serious challenges to the practices of investigative journalism in Ethiopia was found to be lack of due attention to such practice and this challenge manifests its influence on the media practices in different ways: lack of sufficient financial and logistic support for journalistic activities, poor media infrastructure, and limitation of work force devoted to investigative reporting

- **Unauthorized political interference and journalists' lack of trust in the judiciary:**

The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution and operating media laws guarantee freedom of the press with responsibility. Censorship is strictly forbidden by the laws. As is true in a democratic political system the Ethiopian judiciary is formally granted independence of practices. Nevertheless, as revealed in the present study, some journalists argue that it is difficult to practice investigative reporting, which is crucial for enforcing good governance in Ethiopia because of the pressure

from individual government officials and even sometimes threats originating from wealthy business elites. This may be tied to rent-seeking behavior as some corrupt politicians may try to intimidate 'hard-nosed' reporters not to uncover their unhealthy practices though their deeds contradict the Constitution of the land and the present Government's commitment to fighting corruption and rent-seeking as witnessed in the prosecution of many high-ranking executives.

The participants, especially from private media institutions, indicated that deviation from serving the government's interest would cause unfavorable consequences ranging from intimidation to imprisonment; accusing critical journalists of having conspired with the opposition; issuing of formal and informal warning in connection to national security, public safety, peace and order and threatening journalists with possibility of losing job and facing detention. They also stated that fear of facing the consequences force journalists to strictly practice self-censorship and overlook investigative reporting. Most of the surveyed journalists asserted that they did not trust the judicial system to give them legal protection in case they face charges because of exposing corruption and writing stories critical of the government. This finding goes in line with Ronning's (2009, p 116) observation of Mozambican media journalists: "The personal risk involved in writing corruption is enough to make many journalists not pursue any story leads they have, for very understandable reasons. As the Mozambican survey showed, there is generally a considerable reluctance to expose corruption because there is no protection for those who do so." This, however, is only the journalists' version of the story as media managers accuse journalists themselves for lacking courage and professional capability to expose wrong doing by government officials and private actors.

- **Lack of confidence:** The study indicates that journalists themselves are to blame for lack of confidence to address the actual development issues of the people as they often tend to read unwritten laws and mistrust their media managers and the government even when the managers encourage them to maintain balance, go for investigative reporting and produce stories critical of the government rather than always producing success stories. Some reporters and senior editors working for the government media underlined that this problem is prevalent in both federal and regional state media institutions.

- **Professional constraints:** The journalists lack appropriate training in journalism and communication in general and investigative journalism in particular. This is manifested in the practices of the media under study and can be attributed mainly to practical reasons including: limitation of institutions offering journalism and communication training and research in the country until very recently; shortage of well-trained educators in the area of journalism and communication, and absence of collaboration between media institutions and the available journalism and communication training institutes.
- **Lack of shared journalistic value:** Journalistic practices in government media and private press institutions in Ethiopia are contrasting with each other and practitioners in the two media houses hardly view one another as professionals; rather each tends to portray those in their own group as heroes, and the others as villains. Although they are not required to be replica of each other, their failure to advance the profession rather than being loyal to contrasting political ideologies has affected the media's role in promoting good governance in the country.
- **Journalists conspiring with corrupt elites:** Fighting corruption is part of development journalism because corruption in its different forms impedes development efforts. This implies that journalists determined to champion the socioeconomic and political transformation of their country are required not only to disclose corruptors but also to be free from conspiring with wrongdoers. However, the study showed that some journalists operating in Ethiopian mass media institutions conspire with corrupt government officials and private business elites. Some journalists from both the federal and regional government media and private media hold the view that journalists are part of the problem of good governance. They stated that, "Let alone investigating corruption, journalists themselves have actively involved in corruption by conspiring with corrupt officials and businesspersons."

V. Conclusions

The rhetoric on the necessity of good governance for development has been there in the literature since the 1990s introduction of good governance agenda despite the persistent good governance problems (Abrahamson, 2000). This study concludes despite the opportunities provided by the

FDRE Constitution and unprecedented expansion of media outlets under the auspices of the Ethiopian government at federal and regional levels, the role of the media in curbing the pressing good governance problems in the country was found to be insignificant. The media are preoccupied with covering events basically success stories in a top-down approach at the expense of process oriented investigative reporting. Although the media are expected to take initiative in exposing corruption and maladministration and alert prosecutors such as the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission operating at the federal as well as regional states level, the study showed that the practice is the other way round, i.e. the media have predominantly engaged in reporting stories originating from government officials. There are various challenges facing the media, some of them internal to the media institutions and some imposed externally but with the possibility to overcome all the challenges if the concerned bodies avoid externalizing the problem and decide to take responsibility.

For good governance to be practical in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian media need to avoid journalism of convenience and start living up to citizens' expectations by serving as the watchdog for public interest. Otherwise, the vision for sustainable and equitable development, lasting peace and vibrant democracy will remain rhetoric than reality which may lead to a grave consequence. As Seib (2002, p.2) notes "If journalism of convenience prevails, chances of improving life in much of the world will be slim" and Ethiopia cannot be an exception.

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