

Investigating Development Journalism Practice in Ethiopian Media: The Case of South Radio and Television Agency

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Abstract

This study has aimed to investigate the practices of development journalism in South Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional state Radio and Television Agency. The study employed the combination of quantitative and qualitative research approach. The data collection method consist questionnaire, focus group discussion, in-depth interview, and review of sample broadcasted news and program documents (Archive) used as a tool for data collection. Purposive sampling is used to select informants and documents. The finding of study shows the misunderstanding of the concept of development journalism, by the majority of the journalists and media leaders. The pillars of Development Journalism are not clearly articulated in the editorial policy. As the finding revealed, the majority of the development issues focused on success rather than malfunction stories in the media. Event oriented reporting has dominated the long term development process in SRTA.

Keywords: Journalism • Media • Development journalism • Magazine

Introduction

Development journalism is accepted as a new model (theory), in the developing countries since more than half of a century ago. The idea was conceived in the 1960s at the press foundation of Asian nations. This model of journalism becomes popular with African governments in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to utilize the media for social and national growth. In Ethiopia the press freedom was ratified in 2005. Following the ratification of the press freedom, Ethiopia has accepted this model of journalism to use in its media reporting process for socio-economic growth.

In 2011, Skjirdal has reviewed the draft policy as, "... in 2008 Ethiopian authorities presented a draft policy document which established development journalism as an official reporting style for the state media." And, the policy prescribes that, the media and journalists should play an active role in the country's development scheme. The idea of this model is expected to take a part of the social development through stimulating the development issues. For example, in attempt to define the importance and role of development journalism Edeani described the model; as a kind journalism which pays sustained attention to the coverage of the ideas policies, program activities and events dealing with the improvement of the life of the people. An important assumption underlining the notion of development journalism is that the mass media have the ability and

power to influence the development process by giving coverage to development ideas, policies, programs, activities and events [1-4].

Thus, development journalists can play through critical development reporting in creating sense of involvement in the masses so that every citizen tries his/her best to contribute to the betterment of the well-being of the great majority. Therefore development journalism can play a vital role in economic development and social change. For instance, Karithi pointed out the main characteristics of development journalism as the deliberate and active role of the media in pressing for change. Due to this fact, a development journalist is also expected to play the professional role and responsibility through considering the basic guidelines for development reporting to impart knowledge and skills that will contribute to the development of the country.

Furthermore, Xiaoge described 'development journalism' "is as a tool that focuses on empowering the ordinary people towards achieving their development. It seeks to report on achievements and shortcomings in development plans and processes while criticizing the government accordingly" Solomon. In the process of development issues coverage a development journalist must give the facts, interpret them and draw conclusions. It is the responsibility of journalists to critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs. They have to see the difference between a planned scheme and its actual

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implementation, the difference between its impact on people as claimed by the government and as it actually happened. So development journalism "is not reporting about events, but processes, and not reporting about personalities but issues".

Many countries of Africa including Ethiopia have common agenda that is the need for development. To this regard, development journalism has a lot of attraction for developing countries including Ethiopia. Nowadays besides the national media, regional broadcasting stations have emerged, and local radio stations as well. South Radio and television agency is one of the regional mass media institution established independently in 2005. Since its establishment, it has been playing an enormous role in informing, educating and entertaining as well as encouraging the society in all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political development, according to South Radio and Television inauguration Magazine.

Moreover, development issues have been covering in Ethiopian media, especially in state owned media. Journalists like, editors' in-chief, producers and reporters are exercising their duties through directions and guidelines of their editorial policies. However, it is assumed that Journalists might be assigned to cover the development issues without planning, and their objective seems to report events rather than issue. Though, scholars indicated the necessity of covering development issues through critical examination, and evaluation of the facts on relevant development projects, it seems that practiced properly here in Ethiopia, as it could be observed from the outputs.

Even, the emphasis that is given to development is event reporting or what happened in particular event on a given day, but development issue reporting should give attention to what is happening over a period of time. The coverage of the development issues needs planning, follow up reporting, focusing on long term development, rather than the event report. The media has a major role in making sure that the people are well informed about, and thus properly involved in the process of development. Hence, the researcher intended to investigate the application of development journalism model in the South Radio and Television agency.

Literature Review

In the qualitative analysis more of the informants said success stories are given priority and few of the informants said, success stories and failure stories covered equally. Similarly, the broadcasted news and program archive data result analysis reveals more of the development stories reported on success than failure stories. As a regard, the result of transmitted news and programs of Radio, News, and Television content shows, 83.33%, 82% and 80% of success stories covered in all media respectively. In the same media the failure development stories covered, 16.67%, 18% and 16.67% respectively [5-10].

The quantitative data analysis result indicates that the success story is prioritized than reporting on the failure development issues. As a matter of fact, the study may suggest more of development issues covered on success and the failure story covered rarely. Scholars described development journalism as; "It is a tool that focuses on empowering the ordinary people towards achieving their development. It seeks to report on achievements and shortcomings in development plans and processes while criticizing the government

accordingly" Xiaoge. Depending on the concept of the scholars and the analysis above, the researcher bring the idea to a close that the pillars of development journalism failed in reporting development issues properly in SRTA.

Depending on the quantitative data analysis more than half of the respondents (60%) said event based development issues coverage orientation highly prioritized than long term development projects reporting. Accordingly 24% of the responses indicated that the long term development projects have been covered than events and 16% of the respondents replied that the event and long term development projects equally covered in SRTA.

The data analysis reveals the event reporting is prioritized than long term reporting in SRTA. This implies that the development journalism objectives and practices are not working in SRTA, since the concept of development journalism does not rely on event or on a given day, but it emphasizing on process reporting. According to this fact, the concept of DJ sniffs not on what happens at a particular day, but on what happening over a period of time. Theories that have been written by scholars indicate development reporting focuses on long terms than event. Xiaoge (2009) explains development reporting should "... focus not "on day-to-day news but on long term development process." However, the practice of development reporting in SRTA shows on events than long term development processes.

As it has been analyzed in the previous chapter, the study has attempted to identify whose voice is dominantly heard in SRTA? As regards, the quantitative analysis result revealed 40% of the respondents replied ordinary peoples and government officials are equally heard in the media. On the other hand, the response shows that, the government officials heard in 32% and grass root (ordinary peoples) heard in 28%. Hence, 40% of officials and ordinary peoples equally prioritized, and, 32 % indicates official dominance, whereas 28% of the respondents indicate that the ordinary people are dominant. So the government officials' dominance is more by 4% according to the result. Therefore, it can be understood that the quantitative analysis result shows the government officials' voice is dominant than the grass root in the average.

The development news and program archive content (document) analysis shows in Radio program production and transmission case, the grass root level is heard 66.67 % and officials 33.33% respectively. In Television program production and transmission case, 60% of the grass root level and 40% of officials are heard. In the news and current affairs case, government officials' voice is heard 77.78% and 22.22% of the ordinary peoples' voice heard. From, the result of the study, the researcher concludes that educational development programs gave priority to the grass root level and news as well as current affairs have prioritized the government officials. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the media house is practicing the mixed approach (top to down and down to top). Moreover, as discussed in the data analysis, the result on the quantitative analysis reveals more of dominance depicts the government officials rather than grass root level. As scholars argue development journalism should emphasize at grass root level in the process of development issues reporting.

Discussion

The objective of the study is to explore the practice or application of development journalism in the South Radio and Television Agency. Purposive sampling method is employed to select data sources. To strengthen the research finding of this study four data gathering tools have been employed. This study has attempted to analyze the themes that, general understanding of DJ concept among media practitioners, articulation of DJ concepts and pillars in the editorial policy. Further, the applicability of DJ, challenging factors and sub titles are analyzed and discussed according to the research objectives [11-15]. Based on the research finding this specific study has attempted to summarize core points as follows.

- 73% of the journalists understand the concept and importance of development journalism, whereas 27% of them have been practicing the profession without understanding its concept and importance.
- All editors, chief editors and media managers have the understanding of DJ concept and its importance as developing process reporting. Regarding the training, 63% of the respondents have trained and the rest 37% have not been trained on the concept and the importance of DJ. This implies that there is lack of continuity and plan based training access in the media.
- The quantitative data analysis of 31% revealed that the DJ concept is articulated in the editorial policy, whereas 21% of the response shows that the editorial policy does not clearly articulated the DJ concept. Even less than half of the journalists, 48% of them do not know either it is articulated in the editorial policy or not. According to this finding half of the Journalists have been experiencing their career without the knowledge of the editorial policy.
- As regard to the planning of the development issues reporting, the finding of the study disclosed that 70% of the response shows development issues covered without planning, whereas 13% indicated that the reporting is planned. However, 17% of the finding shows the development issues covered through either planned or not planned. This indicates DJ principle is not managed; hence, journalists have been covering the development issues likely in an arbitrary tradition.
- As the archive content analysis finding indicates, Television programs, news contents and Radio programs lack interpretation of development issues with the result of 80%, 77.78% and 66.67 respectively. Depending on this finding the study may conclude the interpretation of development issues do not institutionalized in SRTA.
- In terms of practicing the follow up stories the quantitative study revealed that 76% of development issues reporting lacks follow up stories coverage.
- Considering the focus of development issues coverage in SRTA, the quantitative data analysis counts 60% of journalists' focuses on magnifying success development stories and give hint to the weakness. The finding of broadcasted (archive) news and programs of Radio, News, and Television, content shows, 83.33%, 82% and 80% of success stories covered in all cases respectively.
- In terms of priority of event reporting and process based development issues coverage, the quantitative study finding indicated that more than half of (60%) reports prioritized on event and only

24% of the reports given on long process development activities. 16% of the coverage of development issues are equally prioritized.

- Concerning the dominance of voice in the process of development issues coverage, the study has found in the quantitative data analysis 40% of the respondents replied, officials and ordinary peoples equally prioritized, and 32 % of the response indicates that officials' voice is dominant and 28% indicates that ordinary peoples' voice is dominant.
- On the other hand, the archive content analysis indicated that, Radio development programs has counted 66.67% for ordinary people, whereas 33.33% for government officials. Television development program response also shows 60% for ordinary peoples, and 40% for government officials.
- Likewise, News current affairs and development news have included 77.78% of government officials, and 22.22% of the news included ordinary peoples.
- Concerning internal and external challenges, the finding revealed that, lack of commitment of media practitioners, lack of knowledge on DJ, poverty of journalists, lack of clear legal protection, lack of logistics, and the interference of government officials in the process of collection of information seriously affected the practice of investigative reporting in the process of development issues coverage.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the concluding part the paper has been attempting to answer the "so what?" question implicitly. Hence, the summary of the finding will be interpreted here in this specific conclusive section. From its conception and emergence, development journalism has been playing its vital role in developing countries in the multi-development process reporting. Up to the present day the ideals of development journalism has been working in Asia, South America, and Africa acknowledging its importance and practicing the model for sustainable social and economical change in reporting the implementation of development process.

In 2008 the Ethiopian government has established a draft policy document, declaring development journalism as an official reporting style for state media aimed at curbing poverty in the country Skjerdal (2011). According to Skjerdal, the policy prescribes that, the media and journalists should play an active role in the country's development scheme. The idea of this model is expected to take part of the social development through stimulating the development issues reporting.

As this regard development journalism has been practicing as a journalism model in the Ethiopian state media industries. Thus, the researcher has been recognizing development journalism as theory and, initiated to investigate the applicability of development journalism in SNNPR state media (SRTA). Accordingly, the study has focused to examine the research core tenets like, how development journalism became conventional across SRTA, the journalists understanding, how news and programs applied and the challenges occurred during implementation of Dj in the media.

In accordance to the finding of the study, development journalism did not practically institutionalized in the SRTA. However; more of the practitioners in the media have an understanding of development

journalism in its importance as a developmental state media machine. Some journalists understand development journalism by its name, but not in its core concept. Some of them are neither understanding the concept, nor practicing the model as stated from reporters and producers response. This shows that journalists are working in the specific media without knowledge of DJ and the Editorial policy, which means a ship cruising the vast ocean without compass and wheel.

This concrete fact shows that practitioners have no awareness to the concept and the applicability of development journalism, though they hired in the Agency. The development issues coverage lacks consistent planning in the media especially in reporting long term development projects. Hence, Reporters and producers have been exercising their daily assignment without planning and pre-investigation. Thus, planning DJ reporting for development issues is endangered in Sotuth Television and Radio Agency.

As it is a fact that the editorial policy guides the activity of any media industry and it directs the media practitioners. Despite the fact, the finding of this study revealed the SRTA editorial policy included the concept of development journalism, however the principles of development issues reporting, job descriptions and responsibilities have not been clearly articulated as a guideline. The lack of continues tradition of providing training for the reporters and producers on editorial policy and development journalism was seems to very less and also this made practitioners not to practice properly development issues and other responsibilities.

Interpreting development plans, policies, projects and actual implementation in the process of development issues coverage and reporting on the deference between planned and actual implementation of development issue through follow up stories have not been came to conventional in the media.

Depending on the present study the media focusing on day to day rather than long term development process. Additionally, the priority given in the SRTA on success development reporting than failure of development projects, even though, as a developmental state development riding media, its development reporting requires constructive critics in the failure part and promoting the success part in the development issues coverage but the SRTA lacks on covering failure(negative) parts and emphasizing on success(positive)issues.

As the study indicated, the media challenged to practice development journalism components in process of news and programs coverage internally and externally.

Development by itself is process, and to report the process based long term development activities the media practitioners including mangers, editors ,producers and reporters needs to have dedication and commitment, however this study found the commitment was the big challenge to the whole media practitioners.

Lack of knowledge on development journalism pillars and implementation challenge them to practice on one hand and on the other hand inadequate logistics allocation like cars, field equipment facilities especially for Television program production and like these problems hindered the media as a internal challenge. The other challenge is poverty of journalists which is the lack of adequate payment of salary and field work accommodation push them to be rent seeker and to see the hand of financial supporters and as a

result this leads them to focus on success stories to promote individual inters than the grass root one. Lack of clearly is articulated legal protection to the media Agency that the study found as an internal challenge. As qualitative study identified journalists have fallen in self censorship due to fear of attack from some government officials. As a result journalists have no interest to report on investigative reporting and to cover follow up stories. The external challenge also interrupts the practice of development journalism SRTA. Hiding information and interference of government officials in the process of gathering information and reporting on development issues coverage. Some government officials do not want to disclose the failure of development projects but they are fever to tell on success story. Accordingly, to pass over the officials interference the journalists were developed the experience that to focus on success stories reporting than to report failure issues in the SRTA.

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