

**DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE OR MEANS TO POLITICAL POWER IN  
AFRICA: A FOCUS ON ETHIOPIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores development journalism as an agent of change to ordinary people lives or a political power by focusing on the Ethiopian context. Accordingly, the researcher used historical-analytical methodology to achieve the objectives that is stated. In addition, the researcher used policy documents, investigative research, and educational curriculum for the purpose of desk-review. The purpose of the research focuses on assessment of policy document, training offered in the discipline of development journalism, the practices, the major challenges to its practices, and the educational curriculum in the Ethiopian universities that supports the policy document of development journalism. The policy document clearly puts development journalism as the governing of media policy of the country. On the other hand, the policy document did not get full support from higher education curriculum of journalism and communication departments which exclusively offer development journalism and development communication in a total of five credit hours in the undergraduate level that supply media professionals to mass medias' found in Ethiopia. The policy document has no sustainability and reserved to support sustainability development. To this end, the research indicates that the development journalism premises as a policy of development journalism is not an agent of social change but a tool of political power that suppress the ordinary people.

**Keywords:** Developing Countries, Sustainable Development, Sustainability, Ethiopia, Journalism, Mass Media

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores development journalism as an agent of change to ordinary people lives or political power in developing countries like Ethiopian. Ethiopia set a strategy of sustainable development that incorporated in the millennium development goals which could be included in different sector policy. For instance, the sustainability of agriculture, health, education, environment etc are among the major sectors which need to sustain the social, political, economical and environmental issues in the country. In order to achieve development, as a developmental state, Ethiopia strictly follows the principles of development journalism as one of policy document mass media (EPA, 2008).

Development journalism, the government insists on, has a strong normative appeal based on the assumed powers and responsibility of the media to mobilize and educate the public for support and participation in formulating and implementing national development policies. Development journalism as a principle and practice is considered in the Ethiopian media policy. Ethiopian development journalism policy document considers “philosophical and operational” issues. “Ethiopia might be the only African country with such a policy document” (Skjerdal, 2011, p.65). This policy document defines development journalism as a journalism that makes people understand, accept and actively participate in the implementation of appropriate development ideas that may get out people from poverty and backwardness by bringing about rapid national change and building on positive values of development and democratic change. (Ethiopian policy document on development journalism, EPA, 2008) in Skjerdal, (2011). Positive success stories and positive promotion of development are the pillars of Ethiopia’s policy document on development journalism. The document and internal administrative rules advocate the application pro-government, pro-development news reports. However, investigation is neither promoted nor cultured. In addition to the policy document some Ethiopian higher education’s developed modularized and harmonized curriculum in journalism and communication (Bahir Dar University), Hawassa University, Dilla University, Addis Ababa University, Mekelle University, Jigjiga University, and Haromaya University) that could be offered at undergraduate level. Some, among these universities, offers at postgraduate master level as of Bahir Dar University (BDU), Hawassa University (HU), Addis Ababa University (AAU), and Jima University (JU). Moreover, BDU and AAU recently started PhD in Media and Communication, Mass Media and Communication (2016) respectively. However, development journalism and development communication considered as only five credit hours as of one-hundred ten credit hours offered at undergraduate level.

In line of the above ideas, Skjerdal (2011) finding indicates that the government of Ethiopia didn’t fully implemented and practices the development journalism policy document. Hence, the purpose of this research focuses on assessment of policy document, training and practice of development journalism in Ethiopia. In addition, the research investigates whether development journalism is a potential of social change or political power. It also highlights the major challenges which hamper its practice by considering the designed educational curriculum, training, professionalism, political commitment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definitions, Concepts and Practices of Development Journalism

Scholars define development journalism by mentioning what the concept in capsule rather than providing the usual way of definitions. For instance, Ogen (1980, 15) explains the meaning of its concepts as follows:

Clearly the term development journalism /communication has at least two conceptual meanings; When it is used as development support communication; the concept refers to the communication process used only to serve the development goals of the government in power; Development journalism defined to mean the critical examination; evaluation and report of the relevance; enactment and impact of development programs; demands that the mass media be independent of government.

Banda (2006, 6) also defined development journalism as consisting of ‘news’ that:

Should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues. It should indicate the disparities between plans and actual accomplishments, and include comparisons with how development is progressing in other countries and regions. It also should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues on people, and speculate about the future of development. And development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from country to country or from region to region, but generally include primary needs, such as food, housing, employment; secondary needs such as transportation, energy sources an electricity; and tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity.

Development journalism is practiced mostly in developing countries. It consists of news that relates to developments or social, political and economic problems. Development journalism is a new attitudes, believes and expectations towards the treatment of certain issues in urge of national development in the sense that serves the ordinary people, not the elite (Chalkley,1980). This national development must be based on economic growth. According to Aggarwala (1979), development journalism can deal with development issues at micro and macro levels in critically examining, evaluating and reporting the relevance of development projects to national and local news. Odozi and Nyam (2014, 20) state that “Journalism in developing countries ... is often associated with this brand of journalism and if that is so, it is expected that journalists, through their reporting style should be able to demonstrate these norms” . Still some others state that development journalism critically examining and reporting the gap between what was planned and what actually accomplished. Based on this assumption, Xiaonge (Aggarwala, 1978 cited in Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsu, 2009, 261-2) summarized the practice of development journalism as follows:

In covering the development newsbeat, journalists were expected to critically examine, evaluate and report  
(a) the relevance of a development project to national, and most importantly, to local needs; (b) the

difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation; and (c) the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it was actually experienced by the people (Aggarwala, 1978, 200). The authoritarian-benevolent style of development journalism was strongly advocated by authoritarian governments who believed that journalism should cooperate with governments in nation-building and overall social, economic and political development.

The changes in social, economic, politics around the globe could also brought changes in development journalism principles and practices. Hence, Romano(2005) divided development journalism perspectives into five basic points that: (a) journalists as nation builders, (b) journalists as government partners, (c) journalists as agents of empowerment, (d) journalists as watchdogs, and (e) journalists as the guardians of transparency. Skjerdal (2011, 59) states that “development journalism has, however, attracted considerable hostility over the years. The practice has been blamed for promoting political agendas instead of people’s interests. The strong dependency on the state-especially in African version of development journalism-has caused concern among from press freedom organizations. Redefined versions of development journalism, however, claim to promote national interests while at the same time safeguarding independent reporting”. How development journalism ensures the sustainability and sustainable development agendas in different sectors?

### **Sustainability and Sustainable Development**

Development journalism can assist the sustainability and sustainable development in areas of environmental awareness creation by disseminating appropriate information using appropriate communication channels to audiences. It also mobilize the people in areas of education, agriculture, climate resilience, health and so forth. What do we mean by sustainability? According to Mensah and Castro (2004, p.4) “sustainability is the process to improve the quality of human life within the limitations of the global environment. It involves solutions for improving human welfare that does not result in degrading the environment or impinging on the well-being of other people”. Therefore, sustainability measures the whole concept of social, economy and environment. Sustainable development on the other hand as a strategy includes areas of economic development, social development and environmental and conversational development in its analysis and policy formulation (Ornat, 1997).This cannot be definitely ensured without the coordination and collaboration of mass media through the practice of development journalism policy and educational training support.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed here is historical-analytical that uses both primary and secondary sources. A desk-review of policy document, research, and other documents included to all parts of the article. The analysis part supported with some literatures of research.

### **Historical Development of Development Journalism: A World**

Different scholars agreed up on that development journalism could be a 20<sup>th</sup> century concept and practice which was its roots in Asia. And it could be the manifestation of modernization in Western societies. Some reported that journalism for

promoting business and trade (in Germany) was first seen in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that appeared on a News Letter. In the subsequent decades, the concept originated in the Philippines and was developed into a coherent doctrine in the 1960s across Asia and the Middle East (Ogan, 1980). This approach to journalism emerged out of dissatisfaction with the dominance of Western news and communication ideals in developing countries, these being inaccurately covering socio-economic development. There was a real need of reflection on new type of journalism specifically designed to function in the cultural and political structures.

### **Development Journalism in Africa**

The socio-economic conditions, the hopeful needs for economic development and nation building in Africa and Latin America created a favorable environment for the adoption and growth of development journalism. Poverty as one of prevailing issue in the developing countries could be considered as experimental venues for development journalism beginning the late 1960s. In most African countries government frequently use development journalism to sustain their powers and influences in the areas of political, economic, and cultural development. African media are expected to play a major part in informing, educating, motivating and mobilizing the people. Some countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Zaire and Kenya contributed in some areas of health, nutrition, family planning, and agricultural education program. However, as I mentioned earlier most African leaders exercised their political at the expense of development journalism practice that benefited those who are in power but not as it could be desired for ordinary people who are expected to be mobilized ,informed, educated, motivated and entertained. Development journalism has mostly been used by most African ruling groups to consolidate and perpetuate power in the name of development i.e. they used it as a propaganda tool for their political agenda. Consequently, it is not as I mentioned earlier, it is the elite, but not the ordinary people who have benefited from the practice of development journalism. “In African countries, during the post colonialist era, development journalism has been seen primarily as a tool of government, which can be used for promoting government policies of social, economic and cultural development. Mass media has been utilized by the governments in the struggle for independence and in building national unity and identity after the liberation from the colonialist rule” ( Domatob & Hall, 1983). According to Odhiambo (1991) “historical factors, political and economic mismanagement, and international economic and ideological interests have played major roles in stultifying sub-Saharan Africa's development thereby (a) limiting the capacity of its journalists to play meaningful roles in society, and (b) hampering the development of mass media in the region”.

Moreover, scholars investigate development journalism in African universities which is stated by a scholar Wimmer and Wolf research based in Tanzania (2005, 1):

a journalistic concept dealing with development through communication has been the so-called ‘development journalism’ It is the aim of our article to evaluate its significance within African journalism education these days. This is carried out via the following steps: Firstly, we will work out the theoretical and empirical basis of the phenomenon of development journalism and refer to its connection to journalism education in Africa. Through the evaluation of African journalism education on the basis of training locations and pro

grammes we will be able to empirically examine numerous theoretical assumptions and pursue the question which position development journalism takes in current journalism education.

In addition to the above specific examples Wimmer and Wolf (2005) gave an emphasis on development journalism having a firm position in African Journalism education. Hence, Its dimension is to a largely accepted professionalization in Education.

However, this paradigm of development journalism has aroused criticism. It has been criticized of serving mainly as political propaganda by government. In many cases, the freedom of speech and press was limited in the early stages of independence, and mass media was controlled by the government. Along with the democratization process, also the degree of freedom and independence of the media had increased lately in many African countries. Tshabangu (2013, 312), research based in Tanzania, also describes the problems of development practice as:

In spite of its obvious merits in catalyzing development processes, development journalism is fraught with problems to become a worthy journalism pursuit. Development journalism lacks appeal and vigor and is almost impracticable in contemporary journalism practice. Operational environment factors such as tabloidization; cut throat inter media competition; profit motives of shareholders; lack of specialized training in development journalism; Westernization and juniorisation of the journalism profession; and the development slump undermine the practice of development journalism in Zimbabwe.

Odhiambo (1991, 26) for instance ‘provided historical underpinnings of development journalism as it relates to the sub-Saharan African environment and how it has failed to fulfill its avowed objectives. Daniel also (2013, 6), a research of Ruwand case, mentions the widely practice of development journalism in terms of theories of communication for development after the Ruwandan genocide.

Still another scholar states that development journalism in Africa media environment

“... is characterised by a shift in emphasis from providing quality to providing quantity (the quantity of information and entertainment); from providing a service to the public to selling a product; on accessing the biggest possible audience..., even in the case of growing niche markets, that is, special groups like the youth with special music programme”. According to CPJ report (2011) ‘Africa’s developmental journalism emerged in the post-independence, Cold War era of the 1960s and 1970s. “Development journalism supposedly was an effort to report on development, but it usually turned out to be propaganda-based, often designed solely to favor a particular government,” said veteran reporter and journalism professor Arnold Zeitlin. In the view of veteran Zimbabwean journalist Bill Saidi, post-independence governments in southern Africa still expect the media to provide developmental journalism. “Criticism of the government is considered ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘disloyal,’”

### **Development Journalism in Ethiopia: Practices, Prospects and Challenges**

First of all, media can define economic development as a sustainable process of creating economic opportunity for all citizens. Media can also work for development economic by stimulating business investment and by diversifying the public revenue base and by enhancing quality of life and the factors of productive capacity of national economy and providing an

atmosphere for healthy trade -foster business climate of transparency and accountability. Moreover, media can ensure that accurate financial information is available to potential investors and enhances the ability of poor and disenfranchised members of society to make their voices heard. Further, media can help also in sensitizing government programs on poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, so that public services are made more responsive to the poor.

Second, media can empower the poor and vulnerable people to participate effectively in development processes, and help to assist the society to facing some social problems. At the end, media can affect politics and culture by supporting institutional change and working as a tool for the expression of ideas and development to allow all sectors to debate and construct solutions. Also media can promote democracy and good governance by working as bridge, crucial channel between government and people, work as a tool for an accountability of political leaders, defend the transparency in political, economic and social affairs, allow the recognition of the views and opinions of the public in the formulation of policies, insure that the rule of law is upheld .In addition media can play an important role in political development by defending Human Rights includes the right of life, freedom of speech freedom of association ,right to a fair hearing, prevent or deter the abuses of human rights.

According to Negeri, “in Ethiopia, where poverty is a reality, for example, the FDRE government has adopted democratic developmental state political economy with the purpose to bring about socioeconomic and political transformation. Accordingly, the media are entrusted the role of promoting development, democracy and good governance and a new journalism model, i.e. development journalism has been embraced (FDRE 1995 Constitution, Draft Media Policy Document, 2008 cited in Negeri)”.

Based on the above concerns, development journalism in Ethiopia first introduced in an editorial policy of the state media. After some years, the field formally states on the media policy document of the state media. In the document, according to (Skjerdal, 2011) the philosophy and its concern (nation building and positive image building) were insisted on democratic and development media practices. Its aim was to alleviate economic poverty of the country. In contrast, the previous two regimes used the media for a different purpose. The recent document calls upon journalists to focus on positive success stories to promote development rather than critical investigation. The policy also emphasizes the significance of investigative and liberal media practices among Ethiopian journalists. The finding of Skjerdal (2011) shows that journalists are familiar with the concept of development journalism practices in Ethiopia through courses and trainings. However, the aim of development journalism was nation building and the journalist has to focus on the positive sides of a story at large in which the practice contradicts the stated media policy and the professional demands of the journalists. The research concluded that development journalism in Ethiopia had a three-fold problem: ‘the ambiguity of development journalism as a concept and practices; the political inclination of the state media; and a lack of participation by the public’ (Skjerdal, 2011, p.58). Inconsistent with the policy, different public universities in Ethiopia established departments of journalism and communication since 2003/4, in the stated year, for instance, BDU is the primary university that is a pioneer to start the program for the first time, which started in journalism and communications at undergraduate level. The curriculum at that time did not support even the government policy of development journalism media practices. For instance, following some

year's development journalism as two- credit hours included to the harmonized and modularized curriculum (2014) of all universities those which bear the journalism and communication department of BDU, HU, DU, AAU, MU, GU, JU, and HrU. The two courses, for instance development journalism, consists of a two Cr.hrs development journalism course that cover definitions, concepts, scope and importance of development reporting , different dimensions of development reporting ,rules for objective thinking as rules for writing development reporting. In addition, development journalism as applied in the context of different media, role of media in national integration, traditional (folk ) media, roles of media in nation building, community newspapers, roles of media in family planning local newspapers, roles of media in terms of capacitating the weaker section and roles of media in the eradication of illiteracy, rural development, media and agricultural development ,employing different medias for this purpose, media and urbanization, media and environment ecological balance roles of media in eradicating pollution and roles of media for afore station. Another course which is related to development journalism which was the basis of course is development communication included in the curriculum of journalism and communication since 2003/4.

According to the curriculum of journalism and communication (2014) a three credit hours development communication course incorporates topics and subtopics such as historical overview of development activities, overview of development communication, define development and communication, development communication, development communication paradigms, modernization paradigm, historical context, modernization and development, communication and media in the modernization paradigm, approaches in the modernization paradigm, social marketing, health promotion and health education, entertainment education, criticisms of the modernization theory, the dependency-dissociation paradigm, historical context, dependency and development/underdevelopment, communication and media in the dependency paradigm, criticisms of the dependency paradigm, multiplicity and 'another development'/participatory paradigm, historical context, participation and development-empowerment-self-reliance, typologies of participation, communication and media in participatory paradigm, women in participatory communication, criticisms of participatory paradigm, two major trends in development communication namely the diffusion model and The participatory model, two major approaches to participatory communication ,and mixed approaches/points of convergence

The practical experience that shows the practioners do not have enough knowledge to give coverage in the respected area. In addition, the media in Ethiopia primarily focus on political agenda and related economic agenda mainly that support the existing political agenda. Moreover, access to the rural people was so difficult due to the infrastructure as well as financial commitment that the journalists could attest. Hence, development journalism in the Ethiopian media landscape has been constrained due to journalistic knowledge of a journalist, financial commitment, inaccessibility areas and a shift to political agenda.

Therefore, development journalism in Ethiopia must focus on economic, social-cultural and political development that could benefit all citizens/ordinary people at large. However, the developmental state approach is mainly concerned with the

achievement of political agenda that only benefit those who are in power but not the ordinary citizen. Therefore, the Ethiopian context media are not responsible for development journalism as it is stated in terms of principle.

## CONCLUSION

Summary: The article explores development journalism as an agent of change to ordinary people or a political power by focusing on the Ethiopian context. Accordingly, the researcher used historical-analytical methodology to achieve the objectives that is stated. In addition, the research used documents, research, and curriculum for the purpose of desk-review. The purpose of the research focuses on assessment of policy document, training offered in the discipline of development journalism, the practices, the major challenges to its practices, and the educational curriculum in the Ethiopian universities that supports the policy document of development journalism. In conclusion, the policy document clearly puts development journalism as the governing of media policy of the country which did not provide the ground for its implementation. This in turn affects the sustainability and sustainable development of the country due to the gap in principles and practice. Therefore, the promise of the document denies its practicality. On the other hand, the policy document did not get, however some, support from higher education curriculum of journalism and communication departments which exclusively offer development journalism and development communication in a total of five cr.hrs in the undergraduate level that supply media professionals to mass medias' found in Ethiopia. To this end, the research indicated that the development journalism premises as a policy of development journalism is not an agent of social change would rather a tool of political power that didn't consider all aspects of the ordinary people of the country. Even, the practice itself lacks genuine consideration.

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