



A Trend Analysis of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC): Practicing Propaganda or Development Journalism

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Received date: Jul 11, 2017; Accepted date: Sep 21, 2017; Published date: Sep 29, 2017

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Abstract

Ethiopia location in east Africa, has a long tradition in writing, however the history of its media development is not to exceed a century. Through a change in government like many other countries of Africa there is a change in ideology and a strategy in different development platforms. The media in this case have become a focal target for different governments. The existing Ethiopian people's democratic front (EPRDF) claims that his media philosophy is development journalism. However, critics coming intellectuals and political analysts suggest the state media practicing propaganda. Hence, at the aim of this research was examining this paradox. In doing this mixed methodology was a more appropriate way of investigation. Data was also gathered from reporters and an editor through the interview. Content analysis along with semi-structured interview was employed. Thus, in this research, the sequence is from QUANT to QUAL and it devoted the quantitative piece visible emphasis. Finally, the findings showed that the Ethiopian broadcasting corporation (EBC) is reporting highly propaganda than development journalism elements.

changes with regard to media, free market economy, and agriculture development programs. The government has introduced various development schemes such as the Extension Program to increase agricultural production and productivity, Federal and Regional Food Security strategies premeditated to increase food and agricultural production, the Growth and Transformation Plan, etc.

Correspondingly, Ethiopia strives to grow and to join the category of middle income countries. The national government has come up with various schemes as "no country is without some general development goals or without an overall development perspective, but the ideological and economic methods and means of reaching the goals may be quite different" [5]. To achieve overall national endeavors, the media also has to play its part by providing credible and plentiful information that elicits everyone for action. It is now time to analyze how the media is contributing to and working for the country's development process.

As in most developing countries, in Ethiopia to media has been under government control. The control becomes stricter when it comes to audiovisual media. No wonder all successive establishments in Ethiopia has kept the lone audio-visual channel Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) under prying scrutinizing gaze and control. Obviously, the medium's role is often smitten with what the government plans and implements. Discussing development journalism's revival in Ethiopia, Skjerdal [6] came up with a general conclusion that the journalists favor development journalism as a professional framework. However, the concept gets confused and murky with the ambiguity in the role of development journalism as a concept and its practice, lack of clarification in its scope and political inclination of the state media. Rampant public ignorance, apathy, and subdued political will have also stonewalled the mission when the intellectuals and theorists have attempted to interpret the framework into actual media practice.

In studying the practice of development journalism in Ethiopia; its challenges and opportunities, Negeri [7] surmised that problems such as professional constraints, lack of shared journalistic values, poor confidence, conspiring with corrupt elites and low status of their profession alongside external influences and socioeconomic constraints and political influences have been among many problem areas confronting

Keywords: EBC; Development; Grassroots; Participation; Propaganda; Journalism

Introduction

Located in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia occupies a vast area of land – 1.127 million square kilometers; the rural population constituted 84 percent of the total. At 2012, the total population was estimated to be 94 million [1].

Ethiopia has the greatest share of the population with the mainstay of the economy in agriculture. Food insecurity, gender inequality, illiteracy, disease, conflict, civil strife, unwise policies, lack of access to information, propaganda, censorship, intermittently blocking and jamming opposing voices, etc. are some of the main challenges and history of Ethiopia [2-4]. Following the political change in 1991 and the coming to power of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), there have been several successive policy

journalists in their work. While their observation and findings were vivacious, both Skjerdal [6] and Negeri [7] have not come up with a scrutiny of the content - news, feature, or documentary, etc. that EBC is broadcasting, their work mostly remaining confined to Ethiopian newspapers and print medium, and overall media operating in the country. Predetermined to fill this gap, this research is a comprehensive analysis of the news items on EBC in the light of the source-actor-orientation development news indicators [8]. Besides, the everyday practices of television will have to be re-thought if it is to show a more consistent commitment to the problems of the Third World.

Research Questions

This research worked to answer the following questions:

- How frequently are grass-root institutions or/and ordinary individuals used as the main source of news?
- How frequently are grass-root institutions or/and ordinary individuals used as the dominant actor in the news?
- How frequently does EBC orient news emphasizing on harmony, process, ordinary people's participation, empowerment and impact?
- Whose values are projected in the news?
- Are there influences or pressures that confront the journalists while producing the news? If so, what are they?

Research Methodology and Strategy

One so clear-cut approach to study media is to study its content and there are several important methodological issues involved in content analysis research [9]. To answer the questions raised, sampled EBC news has been analyzed in detail and with care. Data is also gathered from reporters and an editor through the interview. In this study, analysis of development news practices in EBC, content analysis and interview are used because these research methods are preeminent to study the practice and spot possible influences behind the content respectively. It is generally in the combined approach that the study relied on for the interview is employed aside of content analysis. Positively, this helped to get unquantifiable data which hugely added to the comprehensiveness of the research. In combined methods, the researcher will be confronted with a decision to make on the QUAL and QUANT order and whether one alternative needs to be provided greater relevance [10].

Hence, in this research, the sequence is from QUANT to QUAL and it devoted the quantitative piece visible emphasis. The statistical finding served as an input in when interviewing the journalists to get the "why" of the quantified results. The use of such combined methods to investigate the same subject improves the accuracy of the findings; provides a fuller and more complete picture of the thing that is being studied; and compensates strengths and weaknesses of each method involved.

Subjects of the Study and Sampling Techniques

The subject of the study is bi-annual news produced by EBC; from October, 2012 to March, 2013. The time span is selected for the purpose of its timely nature, availability and manageability drive. News hours were decided purposively as the 38 researcher wanted to work on the prime time transmissions; 7:00 pm and 2:00 pm. Priming have proven to be robust across contexts and populations [11] as cited in Druckman [12]; good thing, news that is broadcasted in other hours are often a repetition of the prime time.

Five days were selected for each month based on systematic random sampling, where the "N" th number were taken from each stratum. The total sample of 30 days produced 465 news. A quantitative study was used first because this provides "background information that researchers use to guide their selection of the individuals who will participate in subsequent qualitative research involving interviews" [10]. Afterwards, two Reporters and an Editor were engaged in an in-depth, semi-structured, tape-recorded interview and were purposively taken. The criteria for them were: firstly, the Reporters and the Editor should have worked in EBC for the last six months where the samples were taken. Secondly, it is due to area availability since many journalists spend their time covering news away from their office. Besides, it is intended to gain workers' reasons for the result incurred from the statistical analysis.

Data Collection Methods and the Unit of Analysis

Content analysis along with semi-structured interview was employed to gather data. After analyzing the samples touching the development news indicators, the data collected through interview served to know the influences on the news production. As Schlesinger [13] argues "analysis is likely to be fruitful when conducted in the light of a number of theoretical assumptions, the most relevant of which concerns the relationships between ideology, politics, and the economy within a certain system of production" (p. 363).

In quantitative applications of content analysis codes tend to be pre-existing conceptual categories having to do with part of a discipline's conceptual apparatus [11].

To measure development journalism principles and practices effectively and adequately, the source-actor-orientation approach proposed by Xu, [8] and equally used for this paper covers 12 indicators of development journalism under three categories:

- (a) News sources,
- (b) News actors and
- (c) News orientation.

The measurements, news actor, news sources and news orientation, are mostly used appropriate units of content in development journalism.

Each news was taken as a unit of analysis. Each news is the individual thing, the subject of the study or what is being studied. Unless it is a foreign news or sports news, all other news items were included as units. The foreign news was excluded because the news is a mere translation of what international broadcastings and agencies wrote. So, it is not the description of EBC; it would be judging foreign media. Sport theme is also not part of the analysis because it is now dragged as its own.

Result and Discussion

This part outlines the findings of the content analysis and in-depth interview. Initially, the figures are presented in tables and percentages. This included details of the number of stories analyzed to measure the indicators employed. Subsequently, both quantitative and qualitative findings are examined and discussed in relation to theoretical aspects. The patterns, differences and trends within the news are discussed together with reporters' reasons.

Table 1: Analysis of news sources.

| News sources | Number of stories (n=465) | Percentages |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Development journalism indicators | 99 | 21.29% |
| Grass-root institutions | 63 | 13.54% |
| Ordinary people | 36 | 7.74% |
| Others | 0 | - |

News sources

An authentic source-analysis brought that 13.54% of the dominant sources in news stories as grass-root institutions and 7.74% as ordinary individuals (Tables 1 and 2).

News actors

Analysis of news actors is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of news actors.

| News actors | Number of stories (n=465) | Percentages |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Development journalism indicators | 93 | 20% |
| Grass-root institutions | 63 | 13.54% |
| Ordinary people | 30 | 6.45% |

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Others | 0 | - |
|--------|---|---|

News orientation

The figures for indicators in news orientation showed diverse results, 21.29% for emphasis on solutions, process 48.38%, government partnership 83.87%, impact 32%, participation 9.67%, empowerment 8.38%, consensus 5.8%, and checking function 7.74% (Table 3).

Table 3: Analysis of news orientation.

| News orientation | Number of stories (n=465) | Percentages |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| Development journalism indicators | 1202 | 258.45% |
| Emphasis on solution | 99 | 21.29% |
| Emphasis on process | 225 | 48.38% |
| Participation of the ordinary people | 45 | 9.67% |
| Empowerment of the ordinary people | 39 | 8.38% |
| Emphasis on consensus | 27 | 5.8% |
| Emphasis on partnership with government | 390 | 83.87% |
| Impact on the ordinary people | 149 | 32% |
| Check on what is planned and what is achieved | 36 | 7.74% |
| Others | 0 | - |

The researcher had conducted a deep interview with three to five journalists, but due to data saturation, he abstained to move further after gathering data from three of them. The statistical data are discussed in line with the interview data in the following manner.

Source of news

The quantitative data revealed that grass-root institutions and ordinary people were not used moderately as sources for news. The figure showed 14% of grass-root institutions and 8% for ordinary publics. Development journalism emerged as a responsible vocation to serve the needs and interests of the society [7]. This indicator is informed by participatory communication to shoulder its role to actively engage the people in development works [6]. While this is the concept on the ground, loads of influences may throw into unrealized practices. The reporters interviewed uttered that dearth of facilities to cover such issues, lack of motivation from journalists and huge fear journalists developed aggravated such practices. Whereas, Xu [8] argued that while issues are the weakest indicators in development journalism, the public's voice and concerns should be heard.

Actor of news

The analysis of grass-root institutions as news actors, too, produced near to the ground, 14%; along with the use of ordinary people as actors of news showing a digit, i.e. (6%).

Asfaw, EBC News Editor says, “we have programs, agendas. There are times we go to farmers, urban dwellers, workers, students. We cover them like that. Ultimately, EBC is a government organization”.

Nuriye, a Senior EBC Reporter, says, “we don’t cover people issue from the ground as we do for government offices because we don’t have the budget to cover; television crew is plenty, car and other facilities fall short. We are not given resources to cover such news”. The interviewees confirm that government offices are, usually preferred to the people. In essence, it would be favored to cover people as actors of development than elites and governments [8].

For Chalkley development journalism was designed to serve the ordinary people, not the elite in ref. [14]. Yet this is dreamt of in EBC. It is because, for instance, Asfaw states, “we usually accomplish government works, developmental efforts”.

Orientation of news

In addition, it also showed that government partnership was above expected (84%) followed by attention on process (48%) and news impact on the ordinary people (32%).

Motivated against de-colonization and de-westernization, a development journalist works friendly with a government [8]. They have similar goals with regard to cooperatively establishing and sustaining hospitable environment for the people.

Emphasis on solution

Development news concentrates on solutions than problems. The reporters interviewed backs this idea. Nuriye says, “Rather than talking weaknesses and mistakes it is worth talking success”. In this regard the finding produced (21%). However, it should not happen that there exists a big problem and be left out from the public. Pant and Kumar [7] warns that “...curtailing the freedom of the journalist to report only the positive side of life as a means of social control” is not development reporting (p.10).

“Usually, news that talk about problems are not accepted here; they will not be aired. Consequently, we leave such stories out there for we identified that it will not be disseminated. There are improvements through time, though”, Nuriye affirms. “When the government works hard, we praise its developmental labors. When you find mistakes, you do not leave it, government does not say overlook it too. I have worked for so long to understand that the government does not say conceal me. It is the journalist’s laziness and fright; the editorial policy has not officially say hide suchlike. Neither does your boss. What is questioned is the sagacious evidence that the reporter has to amass. For example, if you have the evidence that shows a factory is creating harm to the public

while it politicizes special, not a soul will stop you [to transmit it]. However, it is the journalist’s effort to catch that information. He [/she] shall have the tactic and skill to investigate issues, gather evidence”, Asfaw discussed.

But, Addishiwot Tesfaye argues decision makers select news to be covered. “I would be called to cover a certain story, even sometimes dictated from what angle should the story be covered and what questions to ask to whom”.

Emphasis on process

Development reporting is not merely an event or day-to-day reporting; relatively its focal point is on long term development process [7,14]. It depends on the process of development and depicts that process in the news. EBC’s practice demonstrated encouraging amount, (48%). According to the interviewees in this figure is obtained mainly because grand constructions are being built lately. Yet again, Nuriye says, “often, we cover events [such as:] when an authority places foundation stone, cuts ribbon when infrastructures are inaugurated [...]; we do not frequently visit rural places to show progresses. Things here are not comfortable. We try to go in different areas for coverage”.

Emphasis on people’s participation

“Development reporting should concern itself with people and it must make them realize the future is in their hands” Pant and Kumar [7]. It should make them a participate of news in development efforts [6,8]. This indicator practice tells, (10%). While the first obligation goes to the organization itself, the peoples’ attitude to participate in television is not also good, Asfaw claimed. Asfaw says, “for instance, you want to investigate transport problems and ask people about it. The incapacitated people will not tell you any sort of information even if you kill him [/her]. But, off-the record they turn out to be fond of talking. They do not want to speak to the media. You find one in many. They speak specially on the radio and FM stations, but they do not do it when it comes to television. Even if I let him to be shot in the back. Albeit there is information, you won’t find it; the people do not want to tell you”. The anxiety exists because the people believe leaders will avoid them from benefits such as donations or other development gains explained Asfaw. This is supported in Nuriye’s thought that reporters never return if subsequent problems transpire on the people. So, may be the people’s loss of confidence on EBC deteriorated than media phobia.

Emphasis on ordinary people’s empowerment

The quantitative data showed 8% for EBC’s presentation in empowering people.

Development news’s aim is “to empower the ordinary people to improve their own lives and communities” [15] as cited in ref. [14].

According to the interviewees, this is the result of the extra emphasis on the governmental activities.

Emphasis on national consensus

Development reporting calls for consensus to conflict. As a multiracial country, Xu [14] places Singapore as very concerned and brought social stability, racial harmony, and relations with neighboring countries. When this is the reality, development reporting emphasizes on harmony among groups than disagreements. EBC's performance showed less than expected, (7%).

Ethiopia, being a home of manifold nations, nationalities and ethnic groups, would benefit a lot from this role of development reporting if to emphasize.

Emphasis on partnership with government

Out of the findings the largest percentage is produced by this category, (83%). Asfaw utters, "as a government organization, EBC receives releases from various government organizations. We cover that. This is the need of the government; we can't help it".

The reporters and the editor confirmed this in their belief, even the giant media in Western countries are biased and frame things towards their advantage. Addishiwot says, "EBC does so and I am not ashamed of telling this".

Pant and Kumar [7] argued "promoting authoritarian press under the pretext of the development..." is not development reporting (p. 10). In a similar way, Jemal [3] argues that in Ethiopia radio broadcast is mainly used as a tool of propaganda rather than as a tool for development and this the impediment and threatens aspects of the growth of the broadcast system. That is why development, reporting, practice is blamed for promoting political agendas instead of people's interests [6]. Development is often worn as an excuse for various government interests.

"It's the editorial policy. We follow it. It is such duties that fulfill our mandate. It is government offices and officials that fulfill what is enshrined in the editorial policy.

Many times, you find news in government organizations. We go to the people, but we finally count on the government again", Asfaw added.

Impact on the ordinary people

The analyzed figure showed for this indicator, EBC has produced 32%. Development reporting should focus on the actual impact on people [16].

In ref. [14] reporters have news plans to rely on. Addishiwot tells, "we receive some exciting events that could be news, and when we want to cover it, a Board or so delays decisions to make the event left behind". Asfaw argues, "when reporters plan, they arrange on the news that they find easily and comfortably". The reporters acknowledged that, often, journalists cover issues based on comfort such as free travel and brown gifts. The practice is against what journalists are ought to shoulder though. It is problematic too, while they refer the socioeconomic and low salary being paid to them

[17]. Akin to this, they do not go after what is significant to the public.

Checking what is planned and implemented

Aggrawala argues that "development news 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...".

Xu [8] also indicates that development news should check what has been planned and what has been implemented. However, such practice in EBC produced 8%, which, is nowhere near.

According to Nurye this takes place because journalists are usually discouraged to do so. For example, "I was assigned in a certain rural area and it happens that farmers wanted to dig some areas for irrigation yet had budget inadequacy. The Woreda administration had the budget and approved to dig six of them; it has been now five months that I never know if the rural people are getting the service. It is not that I did not want to check, I did, but I get no facility for its coverage. Thus, there is no way to follow up and checking function", memorizes Nurye. The lack of facility supply for journalists is so curtailed that, they argue, has forced them to be unable to cover events emphasizing on checking plans vis-à-vis their implementations and chasing after the people's concern.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As thought by and large, "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind". Thus, development journalism serves the ordinary citizens instead of the elite relaying heavily on the former instead of the later [8]. The media is supposed to provide a voice to the voiceless a face to those invisible; it is expected to report about the public as agents of development than mere recipients of it or those poor people, the disinherited, and those who have been excluded. The journalist is expected to report accentuating on solutions, processes and progresses. Again, the media could improve customary attitudes and norms which may be severe to certain vulnerable and marginalized groups. They are expected to participate and empower those who are ruled out or else forgotten from development while [8] concentrating on consensus, harmony and partnership with a government.

It was also more significant for the media, Freire to empower the people to deal with the problems and difficulties with which they are faced. And, television has a hefty power to carry out doesn't matter what efforts in various ways [18]. It has a powerful presence and effect different from other media. It can give a picture of what is happening and instigate the people for action. It is credible because of the picture and movement it holds. As a rule of thumb, "pictures can often say more than words" [19]. Nevertheless, the data show that EBC has produced discouraging development news.

As the development journalism indicators analyzed, EBC:

- Barely gives a face to the invisible and a voice to the voiceless, grass-root people and organizations
- Only a few news originated from the ordinary individuals and institutions
- Scarcely reported grass-root institutions as news actors
- Hardly ever reported ordinary people as actors in development activities
- Moderately emphasized on process
- Encouragingly transmitted relevant issues
- Less focused on consensus, peace and harmony
- Courtships with a government that can be featured in surfeit.

It shows widely significant issues being discussed, decided and implemented by a government to the people. In fact, this practice witnessed the many scholar's arguments that development journalism is "government-say-so" journalism; media reporting what the government says or serving as a mouthpiece. To a firm's extent, EBC should listen to the public voicing their concerns than letting a government pilot and decide the discussion [6].

Development journalism was brought into the surface of the Third World after an inconvenience with the imbalanced news flow and hostile image portrayed by the Anglo-Americans and Westerners. The image that "the neoliberal media has built Africa generally and Ethiopia, particularly as a terminal of economical deficit and destitute, civil war and mass killing, human right breaching, dictatorial leadership and epidemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS". It was meant to annul this wrong step since those are one time facts not an entire image. Plus, with the intention to participate, empower and make the grass-root people as agents in development [6], and the finish it brings a universal trend in development efforts [20].

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