

# Role of Media in Promoting Social Accountability

## Media and Good Governance

The three qualities of the good governance: participation, accountability and transparency require the action of free, independent and vigorous information media.

Good governance was the main topic of the 2015 World Press Freedom Day. The concept note of celebration of this day said that only when journalists are free to monitor, investigate and criticize the public administration's policies and actions can good governance take hold.<sup>1</sup>

"Good governance may be impeded by the blight of corruption, which disturbs the free flow of information, undermines accountability for decisions and discourages greater participation in the decision-making process. Ensuring free press is a priority"<sup>2</sup> wrote Abdul Waheed Khan UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information in the Preamble of the Media and Good Governance handbook.

Aidan White, former IFJ Secretary General and currently Director the Ethical Journalism Network and said that governance is about rights, the rule of law and manner in which they are administrated. The manner in which we are governed is a true barometer of the quality of a democracy.

The majority of the people recognize media has the highest role in promoting good governance. The media should have the necessary investigative capacity to fulfill their functions in good governance and trained professionals and the facilities to gather and analyze information. The benefits of a free press are obvious, be it exposing corruption or abuse of power, uncovering public policy failures, or simply informing the public about the issues they need to know to practice their civic responsibilities.

Journalists and citizens should be aware that good governance is a democratic system that promotes the country's development in many ways and it is necessary to understand its value. Indeed, democratic governance is good governance.

In a democratic society the public has the right to know and a journalist has the right to tell. The right to tell is a journalist's duty to service the public interest to know the true. Citizens want true information on what is happening in their countries and in the world, so they rely on media and journalists. The privilege to carry out journalistic activities is given by the public to media and journalists. Telling requires professional standards.

## Media as Civil Society

Civil society makes citizens participation vivid. In a democratic society, the media is outside of government. The public and community media are outside of the private sector. So, media is a civil society. Particularly, media has a space in the platform outside of the government and private sector, where citizens assembly and carry out the activities of their interests. Media has its complexity as civil society and it plays a pivotal role among diverse players.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-press-freedom-day/previous-celebrations/worldpressfreedomday200900000/theme-media-and-good-governance/#topPage>

<sup>2</sup><http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001463/146311e.pdf>

Media as civil society takes control and interacts with citizens. It is a communication channel that provides an information service. In doing so, media meets demands and responds to citizens' desires. It feeds back from citizens and it is a forum for different opinions. Citizens approach the media when they want to protest wrong doings, and whistle blowers and confidential sources when they want to disclose corruption, bribes and unlawful actions. So, as a collaborative tool of media and civil society which is essential in promoting the social responsibility.

The media informs politicians and decision makers about citizens' lives and their opinions and views. On the other hand, it is a channel to communicate with people and to attract attention. So, it serves as a mediator and indeed, it is an important bridge between government and citizens.

In connection with the above, two media concepts are widely recognized. These are Responsible Media (responsible Journalism) and Media Accountability (Accountable Journalism).

It is hard to define what is *Responsible Media* and researchers would think it is difficult to give a dogmatic definition. It is a term for the belief that the media has a basic responsibility to help to strengthen and support the democratic processes. At the heart of the subject is the concept that responsible media is media acts as a public watchdog, not a government puppet. Simply, media is an instrument to disseminate necessary information. More popularly, as a reflection of cultural interests and trends. In its framework, media duty is to serve the public interest.

There are also no definitions for *Media Accountability*. The concept is that media has to be accountable to the public's interest and in this framework the media must have regular contacts with their audiences, listen to them and be answerable to them. It sometimes collides with the commercial interests of media owners, legal issues, etc. For example, media owner protest laws that dictate what media should report or should not and restrict media freedom. On the other hand, it is about serving audience needs. The audience wants quality information, so, it closely relates to media and journalism ethics. It is an understanding of internal governance, editorial policy and efficient self-regulation. Besides self-regulation system in the media sector, it applies to the internal self-regulation.

### **Media as Social Accountability Mechanism**

If you look at media's roles in society, it is clear it acts as a social accountability mechanism.

#### **1. Role to Inform**

The citizens want to be informed in political, social and economic policies, actions of the country's leaders and decision makers as well as about, education, health, arts and culture the environment and many other things.

#### **2. Role to Educate**

Besides just information, citizens also want to understand and be aware about the meaning of events and activities, the importance of laws enacted and decisions made and how they affect their lives.

#### **3. Role of Watchdog**

Media's role as a public watchdog as is to take a control, to demand parliament, government and public bodies are held accountability and check, if they are able to serve their citizens' interests, if there are unlawful actions or public funding is misused for their own purposes.

#### **4. Role of Platform for Discussions and Debates**

The media is an opinion tribune of the citizens. Social dialogue is an essential part of the democratic society that serves citizens. Media is able to contribute to discussions and debates of different opinions and views on any social affair. Media is an effective communication channel for consultations in identifying the problems of the country's development, elaborating policies and making and implementing.

#### **5. Role to Publicize**

Politicians, authorities, government and private organizations hold information and they want to advertise and publicize their views to the public. Arts and sport communities have similar needs and in many cases, they see media as an advertising tool.

#### **6. Advocacy**

Media is a strong advocacy tool. There are two things that should be considered. Citizens and civil society see the media as most relevant tool for advocating laws, government policy and decisions. On the other hand, government bodies see media as their advocacy tool. In this case, media is at risk of politicians trying to abuse and manipulate the industry for their own purposes.

### **Social Accountability and Interactive media**

Interactive media is a key to social accountability. Interactive media is the voice of citizens, citizen engagement and control on behalf of citizens.

Media will lose public trust, if they serve political and business groups and become their voices. Accountable and good media gains the public trust. Their readership, listenership, viewership and visitorship will always be high. The most profitable businesses are companies that produce interesting programs, interviews and articles to that respond to audience needs.

Second, ensuring the citizen engagement their users or citizens, three actions are very important. User-generated content is the most effective way to engage users. It provides an opportunity for users to express themselves in various forms. Good media always seeks interesting formats and since media started using Internet and social media platforms, it has expanded this opportunity. Finally, media should take care of their users and by disseminating information it can help to prevent from crimes, the spread of communicable or infectious diseases and other risks.

Media is able to deliver the citizens' voices to those in powers and play a leading role in defining the problems, elaborating and making policies and decisions and its implementations and directly participate in the processes.

Social media creates new opportunities for citizen engagement. However, quality information produced by media professionals is able to respond to abusive content that encourages hate speech, extremism, discrimination and violence.

In playing its role, media should take responsibility for its publications and programs. Media disseminates three types of information: journalistic, public relations and advertising. Journalistic information is independent social information. PR and advertisements are paid content and it is a deal based on commercial principle "Pay and I will allocate airtime and space". It is a general principle that support the independent news is supported by income generated by paid materials.

Social accountability is a process to fulfill a duty, to take responsibility and to report. On other hand, it is a transparency. Media companies must be transparent to the public on sources of information,

methods of delivering information, funding, activity plan, number of users, ownership, donors and investors as well as fees for paid contents. Particularly, transparency of the number and amount of government advertisements is a barometer of accountable media.

### **What are the conditions that permit media to be an efficient social accountability mechanism?**

By nature public and community media is a direct social accountability mechanism. With regard to commercial media, sometimes there are two types of interests, namely a journalist's interest to tell and an owner's interest to make a profitable business. However, their common interest is to attract as more as users and gain their trust. The merging place that these two interests meet is the newsroom and the cross over is the profitable business to play the game of professional journalism. Both recognizes and believes that independence is a value. So, in order to ensure editorial independence, the internal environment of the newsroom should be most favorable and efficiently self-regulated. Particularly, media houses should adopt editorial guidelines, code of ethics, guidelines on paid content, guidelines on relationships with users, declarations of independence, a transparent complaints structure etc., as preconditions of an ethical business model.

Information businesses can be easy to abuse or manipulate by influential groups and those in power. In recent years, political and business groups have bought media to make it their private voices or marketing tool.

Real effective media is able to serve public interests and is a good mechanism of social accountability. It can be formulated as principle-based, i.e., based on the principles of free, independent and pluralistic effective media.

Only effective media is able to play its role to serve public interests, sound conditions for effective media are needed. Larry Kilman, Paris-based Secretary General for the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) lists the following conditions for effective and independent media:

- An environment without fear of violence. Fear inhibits investigation and can promote self-censorship.
- Independent judiciary
- The abolition of insult laws, criminal defamation laws and all jail sentences
- System of changing governments. Public officials must be answerable to the people.
- Liberalized access to government and other public records
- Economic conditions that allow media to thrive as business

### **What is the Mongolian situation?**

In Mongolia, the 1998 Law on Media Freedom bans all types of censorship. However, censorship still exists in Mongolia, journalists are feared and they are highly self-censored.

Mongolia people do not believe the judiciary is independent in this country. In general, judges are not aware of media, journalism, media freedom and censorship, and international conventions and treaties are not commonly used in court practice.

Even though, some positive steps have been taken concerning decriminalization of libel and insult, and although, the new Criminal Law repeals imprisonment and arrest, criminal defamation has not been abolished. The libel and insult provisions of the new Law on Administrative Offense encourage economic censorship.

Public officials are still weak and lack commitment to be answerable to the people.

Journalists have access to public information in accordance with the Law on Information Transparency and Right to Information passed in 2011. Unfortunately, implementation of the law is poor.

Economic conditions that allow media to thrive as a business in Mongolia are very poor. There is no fair competition in the small and highly saturated media market and open market mechanisms do not work.

Little over 3.1 million people in Mongolia were served by 446 media outlets at the end of 2016 as recorded by the Press Institute of Mongolia. Twenty five percent out of all media outlets are located in the provinces. Over 280 of the total are broadcast media and in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, there are more than 60 television stations. There are 14 daily newspapers and 96 online media operations. One newspaper is published in the Kazakh language, national minority. A total of six newspapers are printed in English and other foreign languages. Sixty six of a total 4716 media practitioners are journalists.

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