

The Media, Good Governance and Sustainable Development: A Critical Nexus

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Abstract

Media has been identified as an essential tool in promoting good governance and sustainable development. In this study, we explore the nexus between media and governance, media and sustainable development and interrelationship among media, governance and sustainable development. Our findings reveal that no direct causal link could be established among media role, good governance and sustainable development. However, findings show that if media is effectively positioned, it can enhance good governance through disclosure and exposure of governments shady practices; publicizing citizens' needs and requirements, presentation of impacts of government policies and action through media outlets. Consequently, the presence of a good media structure could be indirectly essential for sustainable development.

Keywords: Media, Good Governance, Sustainable Development,

1.0 Introduction

The relationship between media and governance establishments has been viewed as being influential in unstable developmental tide in the African continent (Okoro, 2013). Media scholars have made concerted effort aimed at examining the role of the media in the development process which is coordinated by government and its structures. These efforts have led to widely accepted view that good governance is crucial to sustainable development but linkage of good governance to sustainability of such development through media is yet to be fully appreciated (Langmia, 2010; Okoro, 2010). This study will explore the nexus between media and governance and how this translates into sustainable development.

Governance structure in Africa has focused on political and economic development, but the limitation of the role played by media in terms of advocacy and investigative journalism hampered the benefit derivable from such efforts. As a result, increase in demand for sustainable development in Africa has motivated scholars across development and political disciplines to strongly suggest that the new media system should be effectively utilized as agents for sustainable political landscape in the countries of Africa (M'Bayo, Nwokefor and Onwumechili, 1995).

Crucial to sustainable development is to develop greater cohesion between the media and governance structure and development communities, so that they could move towards a common agenda and language. No-one knows better than the media how inconvenient it can be when people use different languages to describe the same thing; or how confusing it can be to use the same language to mean different things. Thus, opportunities offered by the media can be seized to improve development and good governance on the African continent.

Responsible media interaction and increased trust must be fostered at all levels of society. A key focus of media development efforts must be education in media literacy, targeted not only at journalists but at governments, donors, development partners and the general public; to foster an improved and empowered communications environment. This study is presented in sections. The concept of governance is reviewed followed by the role of media in governance. Review on sustainable development followed by interaction of media with sustainable development is also presented. The nexus among media, governance and sustainable development is reviewed followed by conclusion.

2.0 Meaning of Good Governance

Governance is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. The World Bank (2002) has identified three distinct aspects of governance: 1) The form of political regime, 2) The process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's government to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions. UNDP conceptualizes governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests' exercise their legal rights met their obligations and mediate their differences. Going beyond the mediating role, another document of UNDP embraces the definition of governance from political dimension. According to this, "Governance is a political issue. It deals with power relations between central and local governments, between various actors in society (government, private sector and citizens) and between donor agencies and countries in which they work". (UNDP- Paragon, 2002).

The meaning of governance could also be defined as the sum of cumulative practice of behavior and attitude of the government as seen in the manner they create and use the said evolutionary instruments. Form, style, systems, methods and procedures of government generally reflect the pattern of governance in a nation or city. The quality and effectiveness of governance depend mostly on how judiciously the government uses the said instruments to help people achieve the ultimate goal of their progress - justice, equity and peace (IDPAA PRIA, 2001).

In the present era, the terms 'governance' and 'good governance' are being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Most of the donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure "good governance" are undertaken. There is common tendency to use 'governance' as a synonym for 'government' by whom. This confusion of terms can have unfortunate consequences (Plumptre and Grahm, 1999).

Usually, governance means government plus something else: public policies, institutions, and a system of economic relationships or a role for the non- governmental sector in the business of the state (Smith, 2007). This view of governance recognizes the importance for development

of institutions, particularly private property and the rule of law. Furthermore, Governance has been defined as a network of private non - governmental bodies that have a role to play in the formulation and implementation of public policy and the delivery of public services. Governance is government plus the private and third (not for profit) sectors (Smith, 2007). However, government is one of the most important actors in governance.

Good governance is not only for a type of government and its related political values but also for certain kinds of additional components. It implies government that is democratically organized within a democratic political culture and with efficient administrative organizations, plus the right policies, particularly in the economic sphere (Smith, 2007). At the constitutional level, good governance requires changes that will strengthen the accountability of political leaders to the people, ensure respect for human rights, strengthen the rule of law and decentralize political authority. At the political and organizational level, good governance requires three attributes that are common to the governance agenda of most aid agencies: political pluralism, opportunities for extensive participation in politics, and uprightness and incorruptibility in the use of public powers and offices by servants of the state. At another level of understanding is Administration. Administratively, good governance requires accountable and transparent public administration; and effective public management, including a capacity to design good policies as well as to implement them (Smith, 2007).

The UNDP defined good governance as: “The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs is the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships through which groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences (Ncube, 2005).

2.1 Components of Good Governance

Good governance generally implies a number of institutions, which regulate the behaviour of public bodies, stimulate citizens, participation in government and control public- private relations (Villadsen, 1999). Good governance has several major components. Those components assure the minimization of corruptions. Good governance is responsive to the present and future needs of society. For better understanding of good governance it is necessary to know what poor or bad governance is. A World Bank booklet lucidly summarized the major symptoms of poor governance. These are: 1) Failure to make clear separation between what is public and what is private hence a tendency to steal. 2) Failure to establish a predictable framework of law and government behavior conducive to development or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws 3) Executive rules, regulations, licensing requirements and so forth, which impede, functioning of markets and encourage rent seeking. 4) Priorities, inconsistent with development, resulting in a misallocation of resources. 5) Excessively narrow based or non transparent decision making. The other symptoms of poor governance are “excessive costs, poor service to the public and failure to achieve the aims of policy. The main elements of good governance are: a) Accountability b) Participation c) Rule of law d) Consensus oriented e) Respect for human rights f) Judicial Independence g) Transparency h) Abuses of corruption i) Freedom of information j) Administrative competence k) Administrative neutrality: merit-based public service (Plumptre and Graham, 1999).

3.0 Media’s Role in Good Governance

In order to strengthen governance in developing countries, effectiveness of the media has been suggested. But, the extent to which media can contribute to governance rests on its ability to coordinate and focus more on investigative journalism (The World Bank, 2009). It also needs to negotiate for access to information and freedom of expression and dissemination through legislative processes. Critical roles expected of the media in good governance drive include exposure of illegal, corrupt and unethical activities of the government and its agencies. To this end, it is important for media agents to engage professional and ethical cadre of investigative news sources (Okoro 2013). It is expected that such approach would engender publication of information that is well-articulated and thoroughly investigated without any fear of harassment.

While media role in good governance is desired, it is essential to address possible militating factors such as ownership of media outfit. Media agencies financed directly or indirectly by political class might be grossly defective in playing role of disseminating useful information, exposure of corrupt practices and provision of adequate and well investigative information for public consumption. In such cases, good governance would be defined by the media subject to the interest of their sponsors. As highlighted by World Bank (2009) the relevance of the mass media is the distinction between private and public ownership of the media system, and the need for improved protection and security of media staff (reporters and journalists) in their bid to investigate and expose corrupt practices and activities in countries.

The role of an independent media does not only raise public awareness about corruption and unethical behaviors, it also exposes their causes, consequences, and impact on democratic and political process in a country. The role of the media is essential in promoting good governance and discouraging, controlling, and curbing corruption in a political system. Historically, the root of corruption and unethical practices are grounded in the social and cultural history, political, and economic inheritance of many developing nations. Consequently, the presence of investigative media structure is critical to sustain political governance.

The important role of media in good governance could be demonstrated with an increase in atmosphere of transparency. Thus, media agents are expected to liaise with governance agencies in a mutually reinforcing manner. This, as noted by World Bank (2000) would ensure the achievement of national objectives that serve the interest of disparate communities.

Okoro (2013) substantiate that citizens depend on the media for an understanding of issues, it would be appropriate that the mass media, as watchdogs, are involved or have access to policy formation and implementation processes in countries where leadership credibility is either questionable or nonexistent. It is noteworthy that some sustainable development policies of governments are complex or even challenging to the citizenry; therefore, it is important to allow the media to analyze program objectives. In the wake of democratic reforms in the newly independent African nations towards sustainable political agenda, research on democracy, development, and media demonstrated that all forms of media should embark on the fundamental role of analyzing and evaluating political issues and needs in the region (Nwanko, 2000).

Essential to this role is ensuring that political leaders are accountable and transparent in the performance of their duties. Election processes should be refined and made more rigorous in order to reduce the tendency to abuse the system by overzealous party members. Recent studies and debates on media and development clearly indicate that post-independence initiatives in some African countries point to an urgent need for effectiveness of the mass media to challenge any governance that would support or establish a political environment against ethnic and social integration. With this objective, sustainability of political development becomes a realistic goal in a developing continent. For example, more recent events in many parts of Africa (Okoro,

2010) demonstrate that effective use of the media, especially the news media, can improve the quality of governance and foster accountability at all levels.

Studies spanning over three decades have consistently argued for freedom of the press as a pre-requisite for democratic governance. The media in developed nations are seen as watchdogs of the public interest than as merely conduits of government agenda and information. The watchdog function of the mass media is protective of stakeholders' interest and ensures that accountability and transparency exist in a democracy. It, therefore, stands to reason that political development and press freedom are intertwined in the effort to establish stability in a civil society. In advanced democracies, private media stimulate national reforms by exposing mismanagement and abuses at all levels of government, and reveals corrupt practices as well as questionable behaviors and standards in public sectors of the economy. Graber (2010), Okigbo (2000), and The World Bank (2009) strongly indicate that better governance and effective public policy are inseparable and are the foundation of democracy. Olowu *et al.* (2002) emphasized that successful capacity building and democratic renewal in Africa is the function of an independent media. Therefore, the desire for a sustainable political development is realistic as long as it includes the role of strong and vibrant mass media.

4.0 The Concept of Sustainable Development

Todaro and Smith (2003) defines development as the process of improving the quality of all human lives. They refer to three important aspects of development: (1) raising people's standard of living; their incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, education through relevant economic growth processes; (2) creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, and economic systems and institutions that promote human dignity and respect; and (3) increasing people's freedom by enlarging the range of their choice variables, and by increasing varieties of consumer goods and services. Sen (1993) sees development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. To him, the expansion of freedom is viewed as both (1) the primary end and (2) the principal means of development.

Development measures are nearly always quantitative; it can be expressed in numerical form. Its focus is understandable given the need to make comparisons across time and space, and also to deal with large amounts of information. By focusing on quantitative measurement, the subjective qualitative dimensions of development are excluded (Willis, 2005).

5.0 Media and Sustainable development

The relationship between media and all forms of international and development organizations clearly requires a significant improvement. The media plays a key role in improving governance by providing two-way communication between citizens and the state. There is nothing new about recognizing the importance of the media for development and good governance in Africa. There has been a long trajectory of media development initiatives by a multiplicity of actors, and much fruitful debate surrounding their evolution and implementation. Yet, much work remains to ensure that African media becomes independent, self-sufficient and widely acknowledged as a public good for the benefit of African society. This isn't just work for journalists, or for politicians, or for the Communications for Development NGOs. Networked journalism in this way can contribute to policymaking, as effective policies are more likely to result from integrated inclusive public discussion. Arguments among the social and political elites must be

permitted to enter the public domain. At delivery level, networked journalism can improve a government's responsiveness, accountability and capacity for effective implementation of policy. The media assists in making politics work not just for elites but for the poor too, by making governance transparent, and making it accountable.

6.0 Good Governance and Sustainable Development

Debate over the role of the media in development has been confused, principally because two main roles are conflated. One role focuses on the role of the media in building public awareness and support for development strategies; the second on promoting a free, plural, well trained heterogeneous media sphere that operates as a watch dog and contributes to a vibrant public sphere. Second, different strategies, partnerships, networks and methodologies are required to meet these two different objectives, and much current confusion in development policy related to media because this is not happening. Third, that too few actors are engaged in debates around media for development, and mainstream civil society organizations in particular need to see the media as something more than a deliverer of their messages, and more as a critical component of democratic debate (Uddin, 2010).

Most people have a general understanding of governance (whether good or bad) and development (whether sustainable or temporary) plus associated terms. For instance, governance may be viewed as being synonymous with government or management. So, good governance becomes synonymous with good management or, for a country, good government. Also, development could be seen as being synonymous with growth; and sustainable development as that kind of growth that is durable and lasting. The media should be given the opportunity to advocate, criticize, and not be overwhelmed by government monopolies of election coverage.

Because good governance and sustainable development are intertwined, it is not easy to isolate strategies that are exclusively relevant to one or the other. Independent economic and financial institutions, including academic researchers, have argued favorably to reposition the mass media to play the central role of supporting democratic governance and reforms, especially in Africa, where development objectives have faced serious problems. As The World Bank (2009) explained, the 20th century was a period of mass media development as well as an expansion of global media. An era in which news sources were involved in one-directional, top-down content coverage, and dissemination of issues to stakeholders. Interestingly, the twenty-first century is experiencing a dramatic improvement in the role of the media, especially in providing transformational and expanded structure of news dissemination across the globe with the assistance of media technology. The improvement of media's effectiveness in sustaining democracies has not only increased public confidence in the electioneering campaigns in developing nations, but it has also engendered ethnic/tribal interests and participation in political activities, which was extremely difficult in the twenty century. The difference between the role of the media in the 20th and 21st centuries is clearly the digitalization of content and its worldwide distribution over digital platforms through digital mechanisms and devices. A digital transformation mechanism employs new devices that supplement and effectively by-passes traditional communication platforms that utilize two-way, bottom up, and lateral content production and dissemination.

The nature of the relationship of the mass media with governments in Africa is fundamentally important in order to achieve sustainable democratic governance. Deliberate marginalization of the communication channels of news sources is disingenuous and should be considered the single most important factor that has for decades affected and discouraged the

citizenry from participation in the political process. Indeed, studies conducted in the eighties and nineties (Okoro, 1993) determined that the hostile relationship between the two entities (media and government) has been instrumental to the unsustainable democracies in the regions of Africa. In his past and recent study (Okoro, 1993) maintained the position that to achieve and sustain political development in Nigeria (and in African countries), the concepts of “free enterprise and the “marketplace of ideas” should be nurtured by the political system in the country. He further emphasized that democratic transformation in the Nigeria should be tailored toward increasing public awareness and participation of various stakeholders in political development.

The rate of progress in developed nations (United States, United Kingdom) has continued to evolve because of the sophistication and independence of their media systems. Citizens of these countries depend on the media for information and knowledge and to hold governments accountable for their actions. There is a growing public confidence in the ability of the mass media to expose corruptions and wrong-doings in public and private sectors as well as the media’s capacity to investigate and reveal sensitive issues associated with public policies and their implementation. The development of new media has greatly expanded the functions of the media especially in the United States. Kabumba (2005) noted that the new media did not emerge to replace the old channels, instead, the new- and old media systems should work together and simultaneously to achieve the objective of news production and distribution around the world. For example, hard copy news papers and books are still in use and accessed on the Internet. News items are retrieved on radios, watched on television stations, and accessed on laptop computers and various mobile cellular telephones. On the contrary, in developing societies of Africa, especially in the rural parts of the countries, radio and television stations are the only means of communicating to people mainly in areas with low literacy. Increasingly, traditional radios and television channels have remained the most effective sources of disseminating or delivering news and information on critical matters affecting education, health-care, culture, and other social activities.

Conclusions

This study presents a review of the nexus among media, governance and sustainable development. The sums of the arguments do not actually point to a direct causal link between media and good governance and sustainable development. But, existing information only indicates that media if effectively positioned, can enhance good governance through disclosure and exposure of governments shady practices; publicizing citizens’ needs and requirements, presentation of impacts of government policies and action through media outlets. What all these indicate is that media is a tool of good governance and that, as such, it can be an important contributor to “bad” governance as well as “good.” It can help topple dictators, but it can also help authoritarian regimes oppress their citizens; it can empower people, and it can anesthetize and manipulate them. The success of these media roles is what is expected to bring about sustainable development where welfare of people is paramount.

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