

# Development and Journalism Composite in the Media Landscape: A Critical Assessment of the Private and Government Media Journalists' Perception Towards Development Journalism

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## Abstract

The central focus of this study has been assessing the perception of private and government journalists towards development journalism. It inquires how they understood and explain the ideology. And it has attempted to investigate the visible and invisible gaps and the resultant perception effect between development journalism theoretical framework by journalists and the actual application of it? To do so, individual in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion and document analysis were used to generate data to the study. Major literatures have been consulted and the following key points are included; surfacing of development journalism, conceptual components, and Key components of development journalism, Contextual origins, Theoretical bases of development journalism, Development journalism and its watch dog role, School of thought of DJ, Purpose of development reporting, Objectives of development journalism, Principles of development journalism, Development journalism defined, Development news defined, Implementing development journalism, and The concept of DJ in Africa. The finding shows that there is a closer outlook between the state and private media journalists concerning the concept of development, their responses vis a vis with the multilateral view of scholars show that there still is a limitation in understanding the notion fully and meaningfully. Majority of the research participants tended to capitalize the economic interpretation of the concept and some private journalists the political meaning of it and on a collective view, the social, cultural, traditional.....Aspect of the concept is disregarded. As outlined over and above having a sound meaning of development is imperative in owning the right virtues of DJ. Given the above fact, the views of the journalists are not all encompassing and touching the basic meaning of the concept of development. As for development journalism, the outcome revealed that the understanding the journalists, particularly the private ones, is somehow limited. They defined it in a very narrow angle. Relatively, the government journalists seem to have a better understanding of the concept. However, there definitely is a limitation in their understanding and explanation. As literatures show, the concept of DJ is far more comprehensive and deeper than explained by the journalists. In assessing the Factors contributing to the negative perception of the ideology; fundamentally, the journalists who took part in the discussion, equivocally, agreed that the ideology in its full sense and meaning is not put into practice. In unearthing the factors that tangle the implementation of the ideology, the participants identified the following restraining factors. And they are; Self-Censorship, The Problem of Editorial Independence, Lack of proper awareness about the ideology, Direct and in-direct outside influences, Following up-bottom approach, The tradition of poor research among journalists, Politicizing the ideology, Very poor or sluggish assessment of the impact of the ideology, The ideology is not well institutionalized, and Low self-concept as a professional journalist. As per the theoretical discussions and the findings of the research, recommendations have been forwarded and one of it is. A development journalist should critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between its impacts on people as claimed by the government officials and as it actually is. Thus, the government media journalists should adjust their mind set towards the right meaning and more importantly, the application of the ideology. The private media journalists too should widen their view concerning the ideology since it is a professional obligation to understand professional issues.

**Keywords:** Development, Development journalism

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background and statement of the problem

There is no single most and comprehensive operational definition for development. That is due to the concept encompasses multilateral scope. Consequently various scholars forwarded their comprehension towards the concept of development according to their field or area of studies. Rogers (1969:18) defined it in terms of a type of social change in which new ideas were introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital incomes and improve social organizations. Development has also been defined in regards with the material and financial status of people "In addition to improvement in per capital income and living standard, it also involves adequate changes in institutional and social structures, attitudes, norms, customs and beliefs." (Madzingire 2001:5).

Wang and Dissanayake (1984:5) describe development from a social change point of view.

*Development as a process of social changes which has as its goal the improvement in the*

*quality of life of all or majority of the people without doing violence to the natural and cultural environment in which they exist and which seeks to involve the majority of the people as closely as possible in this enterprise making them the masters of their own destiny.*

Media's role in development can be analyzed from political, economic and social perspectives. In the political sphere, media's role can be found in the areas of democracy and good governance, political transparency, foreign policy, human rights, war on terrorism, and public relations. In the economic sphere, media can play their role in the areas of economic policy and growth, economic empowerment, advertisements and tourism, business and investment, etc. In the social sphere, media's role cover social issues, such as corruption, criminal violence, communal conflicts, prostitution, war on drugs, population control, education, food security, and public health. (<http://www.un.or.id/prog/people/pre>.)

'Development journalism' as a concept is said to be emerged in South East Asia in the 1960s. The reporting style had been practiced earlier, however, though not with the brand 'development journalism'. A number of African countries adopted development journalism in official policy and rearranged the media accordingly, which mainly meant consolidating the state media.

Development journalism became popular with African governments in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to utilize the media for national growth. Various leaders willingly adopted the model and adjusted it to their system of governance. (Banda 2007).

The meaning of development journalism, thus, springs from the understanding of development as discussed above and journalism as a socially responsible profession, serving the needs and interest of the society at large by creating the necessary intelligence they need to lead better lives. Informed by the ideals of participatory development communication, in terms of the general role entrusted to the media, development journalism upholds that the media has the responsibility. (Banda 2006)

Development journalism is "an intellectual enterprise in which the journalist form a kind of free intelligence and should critically examine the aims of national development and the applicable instruments in a rational discourse and solve them by reasonable criteria free of social constraints." (Banda 2006). According to Banda Development Journalism has to:

- i) Motivate the audience to actively cooperate in development; and
- ii) Defend the interests of those concerned.

For Development journalism is explained by Wimmer and Wolf (2005) as "the reporting of ideas, programmes, activities and events, which are related to an improvement of the living standard," implying that the essence of development journalism rests in journalistic principle with prior emphasis on promoting holistic development that equally benefits the people.

"To contribute to overall socioeconomic development by assuming an active participatory role. The media thus collaborate with the larger development team as one of many agents"

(Skjerdal, 2009). As implied in this explanation is participant journalism in which journalists consider their role as participant, advancing the view that news is the product of journalists' "efforts to investigate and analyze what is going on" (ibid). In other words, development journalists have to be intellectually and professionally engaged so as to rally the people behind development efforts.

Skerjel in his dissertation called Competing loyalties stated that: Journalism culture in the Ethiopian state media asserts that the journalists, nevertheless, are critical to the way development journalism is being practiced in the state media. Characteristically, a broadcasting editor maintains that «development journalism doesn't allow critical coverage». In the name of development, the government is praised and criticism is suppressed, according to informants. They claim that this has become the style in all media genres. For instance, when describing ETV's newscast, a former editor of the broadcaster characteristically states: «They call it development news, but it only promotes government activity.» (skerjel 2012:212)

Murthy explains the key roles of development journalism in his book called Development Journalism. What Next? Development journalism is the promoting of development process rather than events; development news covers the entire gamut of socio-economic and cultural development;

- ❖ In its treatment, development journalism is not different from investigative reporting.
- ❖ A development journalist should critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between its impacts on people as claimed by the government officials and as it actually is. It is not synonymous with officially prepared handouts, so-called positive news. (Murthy; 2006)

Hence, the research will look into the journalists' perception towards the implication, gaps and application in relation to development journalism and explain how the state and private media journalists think of development journalism.

## **1.2. Objective of the study.**

The study has the following general and specific objectives

### 1.2.1. General objective

The aim of this study is to examine the perception of development journalism between the state and private media in reference to the development journalism principles.

### 1.3. Research questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- ❖ RQ1: how is development journalism perceived as a proper foundation for journalism practice in the state and private media?
- ❖ RQ2: What are the visible and invisible gaps and the resultant perception effect between development journalism theoretical framework by journalists and the actual application of it?
- ❖ RQ3: Is there a conflicting view about development journalism between the editors/managers and the reporters?
- ❖ RQ4: Do the journalists think whether the development reporting and approaches are quenching the information desire of the public/audience?

### 3.2.1. In-depth Interviews

Interviewing, if well done, can generate an essential set of data that informs a research undertaking most. In-depth interviews, with their "...affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents' perspective on the media, since spoken language remains a primary and familiar mode of social interaction" (Jensen, 2002:240). In-depth interviews are popular in the field of research for their effectiveness in giving a human face to research problems. One has to consider, however, some practical concerns in using interviews. The difficulty with interviewing is that "people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say" (ibid: 240). Therefore, the researcher should, from the outset, understand that interviews are not "...simple representations, true or false, of what people think." They are, instead, "...sources of information only through analysis and interpretation." It is common for people to 'discursify' things of practical consciousness and that they are not aware of their performance in interviews. It is, therefore, the duty of the researcher to 'disambiguate' accounts of interviews from which he/she attempts to make an inference (ibid: 240).

Useful for learning about individual perspectives, in-depth interviews are effective for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, perceptions and experiences. Although it is difficult to attach a single meaning to respondents' experiences from their responses in a given interview session as there may be "...multiple meanings of a situation," the responses can still be treated as "...constructed narratives involving activities which themselves demand analysis" (Silverman, 2006:48).

In direct relation to my research, in-depth interviews were deemed appropriate to elicit journalists' perceptions towards development journalism. In-depth interviews help the researcher to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world. This can be achieved "...by being attentive to the causal explanations participants provide for what they have experienced and believe and by actively probing them about the connections and relationships they see between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs" (Natasha, 2005:29).

I conducted respondent interviews or individual in-depth interviews with editors, reporters and division managers of EBC, the reporter news paper, 'Addis Admas' news paper and 'Addis Zemen' news paper. While the interviews with editors and reporters were important to understand perceptions, challenges, opportunities, decisions, etc involved in relation to journalists' perception pertaining to development journalism.

### 3.2.2. Document Analysis

The data we obtain from documents are different from those we get from interviews and observations in the sense that the former are 'found' rather than 'made' through the researcher's intervention in the field (Jensen, 2002:243). The implication is that documents have "...more limited or indirect explanatory value for the research question" (ibid: 243). Still, documents such as editorial policies, media regulations and other relevant proclamations play a significant role one way or another in affecting both individual decisions of the journalist and organizational positions of the media in question. This is particularly so when journalists discharge their duties under limiting circumstances provided for by law.

I, therefore, reviewed the internal regulatory framework of EBC's media landscape. That is the editorial policy. An attempt was made to review the policy from the stand point of the theoretical frameworks of development journalism.

### 3.2.3. Focus group discussion

Focus group discussion is a qualitative data collection method in which one or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a given research topic. These sessions are usually tape recorded, and sometimes videotaped. One researcher (the moderator) leads the discussion by asking participants to respond to open-ended questions – that is, questions that require an in-depth response rather than a single phrase or simple "yes" or "no" answer. A second researcher (the note-taker) takes detailed notes on the discussion.

A principal advantage of focus groups is that they yield a large amount of information over a relatively short period of time. They are also effective for accessing a broad range of views on a specific topic, as opposed

to achieving group consensus. “A focus group involves a group of people – often with common experiences or characteristics – who are interviewed by a researcher (who is known as a moderator or facilitator) for the purpose of eliciting ideas, thoughts and perceptions about a specific topic or certain issues linked to an area of interest. The ultimate goal in focus group interviewing is to see the topic (which may concern a service, product or issue) from the participants’ point of view.” (Christine Daymon and Immy Holloway;2005:187). Hence, FGDs that comprises of reporters and editors was conducted.

### **3.3. Subjects of the Research and Data Sources**

The subjects of the research and data sources are reporters, editors and division heads. Individual in-depth-interview will be conducted with key informants. And a focus group discussion was carried out with the subjects of the research. Moreover, an attempt was made to generate valid data to the research by reviewing editorial policy of EBC.

### **3.4. Total Population of the study**

The total population of the study is all of the journalists working in private and government media. However, for obvious reasons of time and budget constraints, the researchers cannot study the total population. Consequently, the following sampling techniques was employed in the study.

### **3.5. Sampling design and procedure**

The study employs non probability sampling designs.

#### **3.5.1. Non probability sampling design**

Non-probability sampling is that sampling procedure which does not afford any basis for estimating the probability that each item in the population has of being included in the sample. Non-probability sampling is also known by different names such as deliberate sampling, purposive sampling and judgment sampling. In this type of sampling, items for the sample are selected deliberately by the researcher; his choice concerning the items remains supreme. In other words, under non-probability sampling the organizers of the inquiry purposively choose the particular units of the universe for constituting a sample on the basis that the small mass that they so select out of a huge one will be typical or representative of the whole.

##### **3.5.1.1. Purposive sampling**

Hence, the research employs purposive sampling technique in selecting members on the basis of their experience in reporting and their status in the news room. To be more specific, informants of the in-depth interview and participants of the FGD were selected based on the purpose of their experience and status in the news room.

### **3.6. Data processing, Analysis and Interpretation.**

The data, after collection, has to be processed and analyzed in accordance with the outline laid down for the purpose at the time of developing the research plan. This is essential for a scientific study and for ensuring that we have all relevant data for making contemplated comparisons and analysis. Technically speaking, processing implies editing, coding, classification and tabulation of collected data so that they are amenable to analysis. The term analysis refers to the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups. Thus, “in the process of analysis, relationships or differences supporting or conflicting with original or new hypotheses should be subjected to statistical tests of significance to determine with what validity data can be said to indicate any conclusions.(Kothari;2004:122)

Consequently, the data collected from the individual in-depth interview, the group discussion and document analysis will be analyzed qualitatively.

### **4.2. Development- perception and construal**

As literatures reveal for through comprehensions of DJ, a clear and precise indulgent of the concept of development is indispensable. For a full insight of DJ, internalizing the concept of development is inevitable. The meaning of development journalism, thus, springs from the understanding of development and journalism as a socially responsible profession, serving the needs and interest of the society at large by creating the necessary intelligence they need to lead better lives. Informed by the ideals of participatory development communication, in terms of the general role entrusted to the media, development journalism upholds that the media has the responsibility. (Banda 2006)

Consequently, as the door way to grasp the concept of DJ is comprehending development, both the state and private media journalists were inquired how they understand and define development and the issue was also raised on the table of the FGD. Majority of the state media journalists explained or defined it mostly for its economic aspect of it. They tended to capitalize economic growth as a means to define the concept of development.

To this end, national radio and FM division head, Gebreamlak Teka, who has been working in EBC

(formerly ETV and Ethiopian radio) for about 21 years asserted that;

“Development mean for me is the public’s economic gain and satisfaction. If the public’s life gets improved then it can be said that there is development. It also implies the commitment of the government to enhance the life of the people. At the same time addressing the complaints of the public and fulfilling the economic demand of the people.” (Personal interview on Feb.2017) on the way to find out how state media journalists understood and explicate the concept of development, the other interviewee, Nethsanet Feleke, News room co-ordinator and editor at EBC, came up with the explanation of “mind enhancing process” she added that “when I think of development, the thing that comes to my mind is creating a conducive environment to live. The concept is not limited to building roads or making a nation food self-sufficient, it also includes enhancing one’s mind.” (Personal interview on Feb.2017).

### 4.3. Development Journalism; perception and practice

The perspective that developmental journalism is ideal for developmental state seems to be firmly held by the state media. EBC in its editorial policy clearly stated that the station discharges its professional duties based on development journalism principles. (EBC editorial policy; 2015:6). The objective here is not to scrutinize whether it is a proper theoretical foundation for journalistic duties or not rather it is to assess the perception of the practitioners towards the concept. Consequently, emphasis was given to learn that how and to what extent the concept and its practice are perceived as it is explained by the journalists.

Like that of the inquiry to define development, the interviewees and participants were asked that how they comprehend and explain DJ. Identical question was posed to both state and private journalists. i.e How do you explain DJ. Seada Hussien, senior reporter at reporter news paper, elucidated it as a field of journalism that over emphasizes development issues and give a due focus on success stories (personal interview on Feb. 2017). Her colleague Asrat Seyoum, editor in-chief and has over eight years working career, explained it as;

*I heard of this ideology now and then and it seems a fashionable theory now a days. Even the government and government media journalists are increasingly promoting it. Scholars from journalism school have come here for discussion, research purpose and trainings on DJ. However, given all those exposures, I still have a problem in understanding the very concept it clearly and its distinctive features from the usual or other types of journalism. (Personal interview on Feb. 2017)*

Metasebya Kassaye from Addis Admas Newspaper has also forwarded her doubtful outlook of the concept. She said that the issue is getting a huge attention and yet it has created a bit of confusion among the private journalists. She went on explaining DJ as a distinctive philosophy that sheds light on the economic growth of a nation and massively focuses on development issue coverage. She further stated that the ideology by itself is good. What makes it repulsive by the private journalists is that the way it is being practiced by the state media. They, she mean the government media journalists, are telling us success stories day in and day out and they call that development reporting. Hence, she added, the philosophy is twisted towards the government’s interest. Following her elucidation, the researcher posed a follow up question that what comes to her head when she thinks of government journalists? “A person behind a bar” that is what comes to my mind or “a person in procrastination”

Etsegenet Assefa, an editor at EBC, explained DJ as a philosophy that focuses on development issue coverage and also shows wrongdoings or malpractices. When she was asked to further explain and identify those development issue coverage, she tend to raise all those economic related news, programs... her view is shared by her colleagues Frehiwot Degu, an Editor at EBC, she, in her part, explicated that DJ is focusing on positive news. Another editor at EBC ,kasahun Kasim, defined it interms of working for the good of the public. “it focuses on strengthening positive outcomes of the development process and it should also show the problems of development.

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### Conclusion

The study has sought to make obvious the bi-contextual comparative analysis of the government Vs the private media journalists' perception towards development journalism. It inquires how they understood and explain the ideology. And it has attempted to investigate the visible and invisible gaps and the resultant perception effect between development journalism theoretical framework by journalists and the actual application of it? To do so, individual in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion and document analysis were used to generate data to the study. Major literatures have been consulted and the following key points are included; surfacing of development journalism, conceptual components, and Key components of development journalism, Contextual origins, Theoretical bases of development journalism, Development journalism and its watch dog role, School of thought of DJ, Purpose of development reporting , Objectives of development journalism, Principles of development journalism, Development journalism defined, Development news defined, Implementing development journalism, and The concept of DJ in Africa.

Since the door way to understand the concept of DJ is, first and for most, to comprehend the concept of development. Consequently, the finding shows that there is a closer outlook between the state and private media journalists concerning the concept of development, their responses vis a vis with the multilateral view of scholars show that there still is a limitation in understanding the notion fully and meaningfully. Majority of the research participants tended to capitalize the economic interpretation of the concept and some private journalists the political meaning of it and on a collective view, the social, cultural, traditional.....Aspect of the concept is disregarded. As outlined over and above having a sound meaning of development is imperative in owning the right virtues of DJ. Given the above fact, the views of the journalists are not all encompassing and touching the basic meaning of the concept of development.

As for development journalism, the outcome revealed that the understanding the journalists, particularly the private ones, have regarding DJ is somehow limited. They defined it in a very narrow angle. Relatively, the government journalists seem to have a better understanding of the concept. However, there definitely is a limitation in their understanding and explanation. As literatures show, the concept of DJ is far more comprehensive and deeper than explained by the journalists.

In assessing the Factors contributing to the negative perception of the ideology; fundamentally, the journalists who took part in the discussion, equivocally, agreed that the ideology in its full sense and meaning is not put into practice. In unearthing the factors that tangle the implementation of the ideology, the participants identified the following restraining factors.

And they are; Self-Censorship, The Problem of Editorial Independence, Lack of proper awareness about the ideology, Direct and in-direct outside influences, Following up-bottom approach, The tradition of poor research among journalists, Politicizing the ideology, Very poor or sluggish assessment of the impact of the ideology, The ideology is not well institutionalized, and Low self-concept as a professional journalist.

Pertaining to The true intent of development story coverage and the way it is covered definitely has something to do with the perception of DJ. Thus, the way development issues are being covered greatly contributed for misrepresentation of the ideology. The journalists focus on event based coverage unlike the suggested coverage approach of the philosophy which is project based reporting.

Sourcing and sources are among the main points in development issue coverage. As literatures reveal, DJ follows bottom- up and up-bottom approach of gathering relevant information. However, as identified in the discussion, government sources are used almost exclusively while the news or the program demands other relevant sources apart from the government officials. And this in turn has created a distorted perception towards the ideology among the private journalists in particular. It is known that DJ Give the people's initiative and ideas

on development a full rein in news stories and commentaries. The ideology, despite its entire merits, is overlooked as a result of wrong sourcing and source utilization. As raised in the discussion, government sources are dominant and other potential or actual sources are either disregarded intentionally or overlooked. Consequently, the ideology is misused and even the private media journalists make fun of the government journalists calling them as “Mr. development”.

The findings of the study revealed that editors happen to have a better comprehension of the ideology. This is due to their relative long experience as a journalist and more exposure to trainings than the reporters. However, the reporters happen to be more open to raise issues of misquotes, misuse, and misrepresentation of the ideology. In responding to the question, can you tell the objectives of development journalism, both the reporters and editors of the state media could not mention more than two of the objectives. It is highly essential rather a professional obligation that a development journalist must know the principles in greater detail. Both of them mentioned economic welfare reporting and reporting malpractices as the sole objectives of DJ.

Concerning whether the DJ reporting are quenching the information demand of the public. All the participants of the research unanimously agreed that they do not think that the audiences are satisfied with the development reporting. Some of the key informants responded a firm ‘no’ and some of the used the term ‘never’ and still another informant laughed and said ‘it is obvious, let alone thinking that the audiences are satisfied when I introduce with someone I don’t, even, reveal where I work’. A development journalist should critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between its impacts on people as claimed by the government officials and as it actually is. Consequently, as the data revealed, the journalists do not believe that their reporting meet with the information desire of the audience. Since development journalism is fundamentally by the people and for the people, it should work quench the information desire of the public.

The journalists also were assessed for their perception of who really is a development journalist. Or how do you describe a development journalist. To this end, the finding revealed that Nwosu in his book known as writing rural news and features ascribes regarding the qualities of a development journalist in such a way that a DJ journalist is the one who is Strongly committed to the ideals of development journalism in all its facets, Works for the interest of the generality of the people, Give the people’s initiative and ideas on development a full rein in news stories and commentaries, He /she uses all opportunities at his/her disposal to cover development news on a regular basis with devotion and a high sense of professional responsibility and finally He or she is motivated in investigative reporting. Nwosu (1989: 35)

Thus, comparing the responses of the research participants or data sources, one can easily interpret that the gap between the literature’s description and their responses is quite wide and shows a limitation in precisely comprehending and describing who a typical development journalist is.

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