

THE NEED FOR MEDIA FREEDOM AND TRANSPARENCY SYSTEM

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Abstract

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the role of the media has simply been known that of informing, educating and entertaining. Different scholars believe the role of the media has evolved with changes that take place at socio-economic, political and cultural levels. With globalization so much entrenched the role of the media has certainly grown to include many other roles. The World Bank (WBI, 1998) has recognized three broad roles that the media. They include being an agent of social change, a catalyst for development process and as a watchdog. As a watchdog, the media is an advocate of the underprivileged, and a front-runner in the fight against social ills and institutional abuses. The extended roles of the media make it imperative for it to uphold good governance in both their places of work and in the course of their advocacy.

2. The Role Of The Media

A free and independent media is essential for making citizens aware of corruption. By investigating and reporting on corruption, the media provides an important tool in the fight against the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, shedding light on the wrongdoings of public officials, law enforcement agents and the judiciary, health professionals and corporate executives alike. As such, it significantly contributes to the knowledge base with which citizens can hold both public and private institutions to account.

3. Constraints Of Media Freedom

Established as a basic human right, the right to access information held by public bodies has been recognized not only in human rights conventions but is also mentioned in all of the major anti-corruption conventions.

The media however, is vulnerable to attempts to curb its effectiveness in exposing corruption. In fact, journalists' freedom to report on this issue is restricted when such reporting is at odds with powerful political and business interests or with organized crime.

At the same time, some journalists accept cash for editorial content and engage in other unethical media practices. This is the case in South East and Eastern Europe and Latin America but also emerging in Africa. Throughout the world it is not uncommon for editors and journalists to accept bribes in exchange for editorial content or the influencing of content, or simply for not publishing a story at all.

The link of corruption is clear. The publications of investigative articles exposing petty and grand corruption, bribery, the misappropriation of public funds, the abuse of power and influence, illicit gain and fraud, often serve as eye-openers for the general public.

Journalists covering corruption issues and human rights abuses face a growing risk of incarceration in many countries, where governments seek to disguise their repressive acts as legitimate legal processes.

Existing draconian laws and lack of media laws do also restrict access to information. They prevent the media from carrying out their duties as watchdog of democracy.

4. How To Improve Accountability And Diminish The Impact Of Corruption.

Over 60 countries have passed legislation that recognizes and protects a citizen's right to access information held by public bodies. This is an important component in any efforts to fight corruption, but the mere existence of legal instruments is not enough. Habits and cultures on both sides of the information demand and supply relationship must be changed. While public bodies change their attitudes of secrecy to a climate of openness to prevent potentially corrupt situations, citizens also need to echo the media and capture the spirit of demanding information.

In this paper the main focus is on the need for media freedoms and transparency systems in Africa and narrow down to Tanzania; and how they could improve accountability and help diminish the impact of corruption in Africa.

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