

Media and Development

Dr. Pramodini Jena

Media means the press, radio, TV, Internet based and wireless communication. Media are for the larger part seen as a tool for communication for disseminating information, opinion, ideas, and cultural expressions. There are also cultural expressions that are media oriented, such as TV documentaries, soap operas and news reports. When referring to media as a business sector, the term media industry is used. The media is popularly viewed as the fourth pillar of democracy.

The media plays a pivotal role in the social, cultural, political, spiritual, economic, academic as well as the literary life of a nation. As it disseminates knowledge and information among the public and thereby making public aware, informative as well as vigilant about their rights, duties and the role they have to play in the society. The media not only brings out the plans, policies, programmes and the agenda for governance of the Govt. but also it makes the public aware of the failure in administration as well as the lacunae in governance. Media play a very active role in the process of national regeneration and resurgence. It creates a sense of renaissance and reformation in the minds of the public by demolishing the age old inertia and morbidity and thereby lifting the society into new heights of achievement and development.

The role of media in the literary and scholastic achievements and pursuits of a community is a matter to be reckoned with.

Above all media has become one of the most essential and indispensable part of modern life. We are living in an age where “knowledge is considered as power” and “media have become the social space where power is decided”.

It is rightly said that media use is an index of development. There is a proverb “As economics is to wealth, as political science to power, so media is to enlightenment; media development should be treated like economic development or political development”. The greater the use, the higher will be the level of education. As social beings, humans are sustained by mutual interactions, exchange of ideas, information and views with the fellow beings. Illiteracy, which is nothing but absence of education and information is a stumbling block for any aspect of development—social, economic, political, cultural and even spiritual. Media has become the harbinger of development through the removal of these roadblocks and the provision of information and knowledge.

Central to this argument are three of the pillars that form the central support structure for the current development consensus, a consensus to which most bilateral and multilateral development actors are explicitly committed.

The first of these pillars is that development strategies should be “owned” by the societies implementing them; in other words, they are the product of debate within these countries,

not the product of processes forced on them externally by donor organizations.

The second pillar is “accountability,” the notion that governments should be principally held to account by their citizens rather than to donor governments.

A third main pillar of current development policy—the eight Millennium Development Goals, the achievement of which frames most current international development efforts—could provide arguments in either direction. On the one hand, MDGs can be seen as a set of technical targets, largely free of political complexity, requiring the mass mobilisation of financial, technological and human resources that can be safely delivered by elected governments with little need for substantial public debate. Or they can be seen as a set of targets the meeting of which depends on a set of deeply political policy choices—such as cost recovery in education, health or water services, privatisation or otherwise of national utilities. In the latter case, the need for public understanding, the quality of spaces for public debate and the capacity of people most affected to have their perspectives legitimised in public debate become far more acute.

If citizens are to hold governments to account, they need access to information on government policy and on how and where funding allocated to benefit them is being spent. The poorer people need more such information. They also need the capacity to articulate their perspectives on these issues. The media provide one of the very few mechanisms available to fulfill these functions.

The development policy was increasingly dependent on media informing citizens—particularly poor citizens—on the issues that shape their lives, and dependent on them providing spaces and channels for people to communicate their perspectives. The question then becomes why on earth should the media fulfill

these functions? One answer is that most journalists have historically always defined their mission as speaking truth to power—in other words playing precisely the role that development actors interested in citizens holding governments to account would have them play. Another answer is the fact that the enabling environment both for speaking truth to power and for broader public debate has arguably increased immensely over the last two decades.

Covering development is not a glamorous or high status beat. This, ultimately, is why development actors should take a more active interest in the role of media and development and in sustaining democracy. There is a clear assumption in current development policy that media will play a certain role in society, holding governments to account and enabling informed public debate. Unless they play that role, current development strategies are likely to be undermined just as earlier development strategies (such as poverty reduction strategies) were. Democracies will exist in name, but not in substance, and are unlikely to prove sustainable or successful.

Development discourse over many years has been increasingly focused on notions of empowerment and participation. The logic of a new focus on ownership and accountability accentuates the need for such a focus. It complements and reinforces existing debates around rights based approaches to development and suggests a far more intensive interest in the role of media and communication in development. The net result may be a looming crisis in development assistance, where the essential media mechanisms that can ensure greater ownership and accountability. That development strategies need to be underpinned by are assumed to exist, but where in reality, those roles are under. Development policy arguably needs this role to be played, but development actors show limited strategic engagement in understanding or

supporting such a role. The media themselves may be too distracted by their own problems to engage substantively in such a debate. The alarming, and potentially highly damaging result for development efforts, is a vacuum of debate, action and leadership.

A third wave further arguing that development (in the all round sense) could only succeed if the developers themselves participated in it. Rather than being objects of media, as in the first two perspectives, the people should be subjects. This meant a praxis that was revolutionary - and which aimed at conscientising people to overthrow local agents of imperialism who were seen as the immediate stumbling block to development.

From the Modernization approach, one can take the point that it is indeed evident that the dissemination of media technology is an important question in development. Participation is part of ensuring that the global public sphere includes the interests of the underdeveloped. This is a contribution towards liberation. As a whole media has a critical bridging role to play—not only to reinforce dominance and dependency between exploited relation of first world and the actual integration of Third World economy but also began to critique the notion of “development”, saying that it had to incorporate a level of equity, else it was mere growth to the extent that change was envisaged.

In matters of freedom of religion or belief, media presents fair and balanced coverage. However, that is not always what happens. Media is essential for some kind of global media observatory for news coverage and representations of religion and religious affairs.

Mass and community media can unthinkingly reinforce stigmatisation and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS.

Peace journalism falls squarely within the right to communicate - strengthening the ability of people and communities to make known their economic, political, social, and cultural aspirations in order to resolve tensions and reach peaceful solutions to conflict.

All new technologies of communication bring advantages and disadvantages. All such technologies have democratic potential. With new social media, there remain significant questions of accountability, affordable access, digital divides, surveillance, privacy, exploitation, and cultural transformation.

Today's many borders - physical and psychological, political and social, cultural and ideological - are no longer fixed or impermeable. Overcoming them is mainly about overcoming the socially constructed limitations of belonging to a certain place and going beyond what is apparently sure and secure. Media is highly essential for safe passage in Borderlands, the places of negotiation.

However, the role of media in general, and new media in particular, is a limited, albeit important, one. In short, it can play a supportive role, but is unlikely to be the driving force or catalyst - that is the place of wider, and over determining, political and economic processes. There is no “magic” that will be wrought. They can widen horizons, focus attention, raise aspirations and create a climate for development. They can help only indirectly to change strongly held attitudes or valued practices, but they can affect attitudes lightly held and channelize stronger beliefs. They can feed richer material into the interpersonal dialogue that must carry much of the informational flow in less technically developed areas. However, effective use of new media can still be of great value.

Dr. Pramodini Jena, Andhia sahi, Nimapara, Puri-752106.