

PR-isation of the Media: An Examination of Development Journalism in Amhara Radio Obscured by Public Relations Tactics

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to look into how rural development news was covered and reported in the evening 6:00 p.m. news on Amhara Radio. Data for the study were gathered through content analysis, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. The agenda-setting theory and the model of development journalism served as the theoretical framework for the study. The findings reveal that rural development news items got relatively little coverage and frequency distribution during the period of study. The radio news is dominated by public relations reporting, success-oriented stories, in favour of events, and followed upward approaches. It is clearly observed that public relations have become the dominant news sources. Journalism is under the shade of public relations. Besides, the news contents were found to be against the principles of development news. The medium placed insignificant contributions to rural issues as evident in the inadequate placement of stories first and paucity of in-depth and interpretative analysis of issues. The findings revealed that the medium is not in a position to promote rural development which is/was the country's top priority and considered being the central pillar of the economic policy. The research recommends this "PR-isation" of mass media jeopardises the profession and hence should be stopped.

Keywords: News, public relations, "PR-isation", rural development, rural journalism, development journalism, Ethiopian journalism

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Introduction

Background and Justification

Mass media now play a significant role in society's political, economic, and sociocultural activities, making them crucial to both governments and the general public, especially in democracies where the people are the source of political power. Most crucially, the media have long been acknowledged as engines of growth in underdeveloped countries where the bulk of the populace suffers from unsatisfactory socioeconomic and political situations (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

According to MoFED (2003), 85% of Ethiopia's population still works in agriculture and lives in rural regions. The government's agenda constantly prioritises rural development. Rural development journalism is one particular issue which still calls for special attention, along with roads, drinking water, poverty, employment, education, and health as the important areas of the rural areas where a lot of work has to be necessary (MoFED, 2003).

The Ethiopian Government's rural and agricultural development policy and strategies, which were put together by MoFED, emphasise that the country's development policy will only be implemented successfully if farmers, journalists, and other relevant groups of society have a clear understanding of the ideas, objectives, and missions of the plan (MoFED, 2003). This paper is based on the assumption that media here play fundamental roles in forming a clear and common understanding by revealing the development strategies and policies that mainly focus on the rural and the agriculture sector which is the basis of the country's economic development. Therefore, this study tried to assess news coverage and the practice of Development Journalism with a focus on

Rural Development News in Amhara Radio (AR) and their contribution to the information required to advance the development of the Region.

According to the 2010 International Food Policy Research Institute report (IFPRI), the poverty reduction strategies in Ethiopia relied mainly on agriculture and rural development investments due to the overwhelming population that derives their livelihood from rural activities (p.76). The Ethiopian Rural Development Policy (2003) stated that rural agriculture has dominance on the overall Ethiopian economy since agriculture provides for about 80% of the economy and 45% of the GDP. According to the policy, adopting a strategy that encourages the economic uses of our limited capital resources and a more extensive application of our labor and land resources, particularly the former, is the only way to ensure that rural and agriculture-centered development is realized. Our resources potential can be highly utilized in the agricultural sector for quick and steady economic growth. Due to agriculture's dominance in the economy, a rural and agriculture-focused development strategy can contribute to accelerated economic growth by ensuring rapid growth in the entire economy (The Ethiopian Rural Development Policy, 2003).

Ethiopia is one of the countries using development journalism (DJ) in its state media. Skjeldar explained that in 2008, Ethiopian authorities presented a policy document highlighting development journalism as the official reporting style of the state media. This policy stipulates that media and journalists should play an active role in national development plans (Skjerdal, 2009).

Even though they play important roles, the mass media have come under fire for allegedly serving elitist interests because the shows broadcast and articles written are either linguistically inaccessible to rural audiences or

barely relevant to underprivileged communities (Tuurosong & Kendie, 2014). For instance, Beltran (1976) noted that the push for modernization by the developing world has rendered media ineffective in promoting development.

Even though the aforementioned researchers concurred that there have been challenges in implementing DJ in Ethiopia, the majority of studies related to this topic have relied heavily on information gathered from journalists and media managers and have only focused on national media, excluding regional media news coverage. According to Ayele's (2014) study on the application of development journalism in Amhara Radio, there are a variety of obstacles that affect the practice of development journalism in Amhara Radio, including emphasizing economic growth, promoting the government's good intentions, ignoring constructive criticism, etc. He concentrates on the general aspect of DJ, just like other researchers do. In order to close this research gap, the researchers felt that it is crucial to assess and evaluate the news coverage given to rural development issues on Amhara Radio. This study is framed by agenda-setting theory and development journalism model.

Background of the Amhara Mass Media Agency (AMMA) and the Amhara Radio (AR)

The Amhara Regional State Mass Media Agency was established by the Regional Proclamation No. 56/2001 and Regional Proclamation No. 88/2003. It has its own autonomy and is responsible to the Amhara National Regional State Council (AMMA (2013)). The regional government's program for promoting development, lasting peace, and democratization includes AMMA as one of its regional stakeholders (AMMA, 2013). Amhara Radio, ATV, FM Radio, print media, and its

official website are the four media platforms used by AMMA. Amhara Radio was established as one of the departments in 1997. One of the first media outlets in Ethiopia to launch its service at the regional state level is the Amhara Radio (AMMA, 2013).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess the coverage and practice of development journalism with a focus on rural development news in Amhara Radio. The research with its specific objectives attempted:

1. To evaluate the proportion of rural development concerns covered by Amhara Radio airtime in comparison to each category of news.
2. To identify the priority given to rural development issues among other categories of news broadcast by the Amhara Radio.
3. To examine the practice of Amhara Radio in reportage of rural development with the principles of development news.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. To what extent does the Amara Radio cover rural development issues during the time of this study?
2. What are the priority issues that are given more emphasis on news reporting of Amhara Radio?
3. To what extent does Amhara Radio present its news in accordance with the principles of *development* news reporting?

Scope of the Study

Since the target research media house was Amhara Radio, this research was delimited to the practices of Amhara Radio with specific reference to rural development news broadcast 6:00 p.m. evening news (*zena metsehet*) coverage. Therefore, a three months news program that is from March 8/2017 – June 8/2017 is selected purposively.

Literature Review

Rural Development

Development is not characterized by a single definition. Different academics define the term "development" differently depending on their field of study, including Rogers (1969), Nyerere (1974), Khiabany (1999), Madzingire (2001), Chugn (2003) and others. The late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere (1974) had a different understanding of what constitutes development, to begin with. He claimed that development does not include things like roads, buildings, increased crop production, and other similar things. They are merely development tools. Development to him meant the advancement of the populace.

Development is discussed by Wang and Dissanayake (1984) from the perspective of social change. They defined development as a process of social changes with the improvement of all or the majority of people's quality of life as their end goal, without causing harm to the natural and cultural environment in which they exist, and that seeks to involve the majority of people as closely as possible in this endeavor, making them the masters of their own destiny.

Development must include more than just the material and financial status of individuals, according to Madzingire (2001). It involves

adequate changes in institutional and social structures, attitudes, norms, customs, and beliefs in addition to an increase in per capita income and living standards. According to Rogers (1969), development is a form of social change in which fresh perspectives are brought into a society in an effort to raise per capita incomes and strengthen social structures.

In a broader context, another researcher, Khiabany (1999), presented his own viewpoint. According to him, development is a shift in how politics, the economy, and society are organized. Development is a multi-dimensional process of advancement in the socio-political, economic and psychological aspects of human life (Amucheazi, 1980).

According to Rodney (1972), development entails the acquisition of new knowledge and abilities, as well as greater freedom, creativity, self-control, and financial security. These scholars' multifaceted approaches should serve as a reminder that development must be viewed from a wider angle, starting with the premise that development is multifaceted and people-centered. Development generally refers to efforts to enhance people's lives and conditions, implying progress and a higher level of sophistication across all domains (Nwanne, 2013).

The World Bank (2015) defined rural development as the overall development of a rural area with the goal of enhancing the quality of life for rural residents. It is a multidisciplinary field that combines the fields of agricultural, social, behavioural, and management science. Additionally, rural development denotes a greater degree of social and economic change in the surrounding area. It can also be described as providing the local capacity, investing in basic infrastructure and social services, addressing historical injustice, ensuring the safety and security of the rural populations, especially that of women, and assisting rural

people in setting the priorities in their own communities through effective and democratic bodies.

Development Journalism (DJ)

A new journalism model informed by theories of development communication was introduced to the developing world, including Africa, during the post-World War II "era of development" and independence from colonial rule. The definition and application of development journalism, however, appear to be unclear (Skjerdal, 2009). The idea of development journalism, according to Banda (2006), has been infatuated by misunderstandings concerning its validity and practicality. The very notion of development journalism is different from the Western concept of press freedom and the role of media in democracy and national development.

The definition of development journalism is derived from the understanding of development as it was previously discussed and from the notion of journalism as a socially responsible profession that serves the needs and interests of society at large by generating the knowledge required for people to live better lives. In terms of the broader function given to the media, development journalism has a role to facilitate the active participation of the society for the overall socioeconomic development. This assumption of the role of the media in the development process is influenced by the ideas of participatory development communication. Thus, as one of many agents, the media works with the larger development team (Skjerdal, 2009). The notion that news is the result of journalists' efforts to examine and scrutinize what is going on is advanced by participant journalism, which is implied in this explanation (Williams, 2003). In order to motivate people to support

development efforts, development journalists must be intellectually and professionally engaged.

Development journalism, according to Banda (2006), is an intellectual endeavour in which the journalist develops a sort of free intelligence and ought to critically assess the objectives of the nation's development and the relevant tools in a rational discourse and resolve them by acceptable standards free of social constraints. In order to achieve this, he continues, development journalism must encourage audience involvement in development, and defend the rights of people it affects.

Wimmer and Wolf (2005) assert that reporting on concepts, initiatives, events, and activities that aim to raise the standard of living indicates that the core of development journalism is grounded in journalistic ethics with a prior focus on advancing inclusive, holistic development.

Development journalism, according to Murthy (2006), is the advocacy of processes of development rather than events. Development news is comparable to investigative reporting in that it covers all facets of socioeconomic and cultural progress.

The suitability of a development project to both national and local requirements should be critically assessed, evaluated, and reported on. A development journalist should also highlight any discrepancies between the initiative's claimed and actual human impact.

Criteria for Development News

The characteristics of the message itself, rather than the source of the message, such as independent or government-controlled media, should be used to determine whether or not a news item can potentially contribute to development (Donsbach, 2008). In a similar vein, Shah (1996) and

other authors have outlined the traits of successful development news. It ought to:

- evaluate, interpret, and critically assess the applicability of development plans, policies, and programs.
- describe the differences between goals and actual results.
- make comparisons with how other nations and regions' development is developing.
- discuss the effects of plans, projects, and policies on people.
- speculate about the future of development.
- make reference to basic needs of the populace.
- provide context and background information about the development process.

Shah has also listed the following five principles as DJ's main components.

1. DJ is interested in development's social, cultural, and political facets as well as its economic ones. It supports and makes a contribution to human development, which is concerned with assisting people in meeting their most basic needs and reducing inequality and poverty.
2. It emphasizes communication from the "bottom-up" and is democratic. Reporting from the bottom up incorporates the opinions and viewpoints of those who are most negatively impacted.
3. Its method of reporting is both practical and unorthodox. Development journalism explicitly works to encourage social action and reform while traditional journalism reports on facts that are believed to be true.

4. Development journalists assume the position of professional intellectuals, igniting social movements and promoting awareness of the necessity of taking action.

5. Development journalists encourage the *production of development journalism at multiple sites*, both geographically and within the overall structure of the news industry

Research Methodology

Research Design

Because the country's development plans heavily rely on the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI), which gives priority to rural and agricultural activities, this study focused on the coverage and practice of development journalism with a focus on rural development. As a result, both a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative method were used to examine the extent of coverage and actual practice of rural development issues in the evening news.

Based on two presumptions, both qualitative and quantitative designs were used for this study. The first reason, according to Bhattacharjee (2012), is that studying how news stories about rural development are covered in Amahara Radio (AR) calls for the use of content analysis methods. These methods are popular and appropriate for media content analysis research of news stories that quantitatively address the needs of rural development. In order to produce more comprehensive data and original insights not possible from either type of research alone for comparative examinations, researchers like Keith (1998), Corbetta (2003), Gunter (2000) and others advocate mixed-mode research, which combines both research methods instead of just one.

Keith (1998) also pointed out that the results of one type of study can be compared to the results of the other type. Because of the latter dimension, a portion of the study's contents cannot be identified by quantitative content analysis, necessitating the use of qualitative data. Additionally, using a single approach, particularly a quantitative method, to investigate the difficulties in applying development communication practice in AR may limit the accuracy of the results and the thoroughness of the data.

To obtain information that captures the various dimensions of respondents' experiences, personal perspectives, and meanings regarding the primary difficulties in addressing rural development issues in AR, the qualitative approach was used. To pinpoint the specific issues affecting the coverage of rural development in AR, the qualitative method of data analysis was used. To sum up, the study is partly qualitative because it analyzes the responses gleaned from open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. On the other hand, the quantitative component included counting the number of news items, tracking airtimes, classifying the news's contents, and identifying the news's producers.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Population of the Study

Amhara Radio is selected as a subject of the research for the reason that it has large audience among regional media and it is the first regional radio station. In fact, it is state-owned media house with a mandate to use broadcasting for promoting development (AMMA, 2011). Furthermore, it has a direct relation and impact on the rural activities, owing to its cost effectiveness, coverage, usage, portability, unlimited boundary, etc.

“Radio is a channel for national campaign to persuade the people about specific and selected health and agricultural practices” (Servaes, 1999, p. 31).

Amhara Radio is hence chosen as a subject of study purposely owing to the facts aforementioned about its potential strengths. The population of the study was the daily 6:00 p.m. evening news broadcast within 90 days and 30 staff members, i.e., reporters, editors, editor-in-chief and media managers, of Amhara Radio. Therefore, there were two types of population: daily evening news from which content analysis (621 evening news aired in 40 days) data has been gathered; and a total of 30 professionals comprising 24 reporters, 4 editors, 1 editor-in-chief and 1 media manager from whom data for qualitative analysis (interview respondents) have gathered. The total of 40 days ‘of 621 evening aired news items’ content was categorized into different groups (rural development, politics, social, economy, foreign, and others) in order to answer the research questions.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

As it was depicted above, the population and of subjects of the study were, respectively, the daily evening news and a total of 30 professionals comprising 24 reporters, 4 editors, 1 editor-in-chief and 1 media managers of Amhara Radio. With regard to content analysis, it was rarely either possible or desirable to analyse absolutely all media coverage of subjects, areas, or issues. It is naturally difficult to analyse the whole contents of media which is massive volumes of text, sound, and images. For practical reasons, therefore, content analysis must start with the selection and narrowing down of the types of coverage to be analysed (Anderson, 1987). This shows that studying the whole and bulk of

contents cannot be achieved at the same time in a convenient manner and it becomes uncontrollable data to analyse all.

Thus, the researcher selected a specific period of time in AR news contents to narrow down and to make the sample size manageable. Therefore, a three months news program that is from March 8/2017 – May 8/2017 (*Megabit-t-Miyaziya-Ginbot*) is selected purposively. Because it is the recent year and this may reduce, if it happens, the lack of recorded audio data kept in the agency's archive. Accordingly, in order to make the study more specific, manageable and result-oriented, the researchers have taken two weeks from each of the sample months which amount to a total of 40 days. Thus, 6:00 p.m. evening transmission time news was chosen as a sample with the assumption that this time is appropriate for audiences to listen to the program. The 6:00 p.m. news, in prime time includes more stories than other news times. This is because news stories often reach the newsroom in the afternoon and some of important news items are repeated in the night time. To be more consistent with the above sampling, the weeks selected by lottery method are shown below.

No	Months	Weeks	No. of Days	Weeks Selected by Lottery Method	Remark
1	Megabit (Mar, 10-April 8)	1	3		
		2	7		
		3	7	<i>Selected</i>	
		4	7		
		5	6	<i>Selected</i>	
2	Miyaziya (April 9-May 8)	1	7	<i>Selected</i>	
		2	7	<i>Selected</i>	
		3	7		

		4	7		
		5	2		
3	Ginbot (May9 - June 6)	1	6	<i>Selected</i>	
		2	7	<i>Selected</i>	
		3	7		
		4	7		
		5	3		
	Total	16	90	6 weeks =40 days	

Table 1: Sample Weeks Selected for Content Analysis

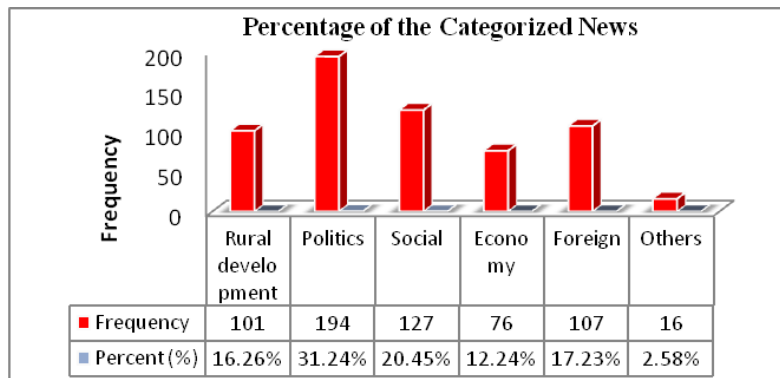
With regard to selecting interview respondents and questionnaire participants, 5 respondents (3 editors, 1 editor-in-chief and 1 media manager) were purposively selected. The reason behind using purposive sampling method is that interviews are unique for the reason they generally use smaller samples (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Bhattacharjee (2012) also said qualitative research often uses small, focused samples that suit the phenomenon of interest, rather than large, random samples. Furthermore, in order to better understand how the government officials reflected, an interview will be conducted with the public relation process owner in the Agriculture Bureau of the Region. The rest 24 reporters were taken entirely for questionnaire since managing such a large number is not difficult and tedious for the researcher.

Findings

This part presents and discusses the findings of the research.

Content Analysis of Major Categories of News and Coverage

Frequency of the News Type and their Percentage

Figure 1: Frequency of the News Type and their Percentage

As it can be shown in the above figure, the news items are categorized into six groups. Most issues relating to rural development (such as social rural, economic rural, business rural, weather, etc.) are commonly incorporated in rural development category. The figure depicted the frequency of news broadcast in those sampled 40 days of the evening news of Amhara Radio.

Social, economic, business, etc. issues are supposed to be different from social rural, economic rural, business rural, etc. issues due to the fact that the former group are general for they incorporate urban cases.

The highest frequency, from the total of 621 news items collected using the content analysis method, was politics having 194 (31.24%) news. The second category with highest frequency was social issues having 127 (20.45%) items. Foreign news with 107 (17.23%) items was the third highest category that got coverage by Amhara Radio. The economic and other news got lesser coverage with 76 (12.24%) and 16 (2.58%) news items, respectively. Here, the rural development news, which is the main

target of this study, was the fourth frequent news item by sharing 16.26% of the totality of news stories, i.e., 101 news items were rural development stories. It was found that although the AR has the aim of broadcasting or covering the region's natural resources and multi-dimensional development activities and increasing the participation, the large mass of the rural populace in development endeavours at large (AMMA Editorial Policy; 2011), such coverage, was minimal. Figuratively, the coverage of rural development news was given less emphasis than the coverage given to foreign news items.

Hence, the findings indicate that the coverage given to rural development by the station is questionable. This is also clear from Chugn's (2002) and Skjerdal's (2011) observation that most government media in Ethiopia give more emphasis to political agenda rather than development issues. Rural development is government's top priority and considered being the central pillar of economic policy and the Growth and Transformation Plan (MoFED, 2003). The agriculture-centred rural development program has been adopted as a major strategy expected to assist in the realization of the country's economic development objective (MoFED, 2003).

Besides, the editorial policy also declared that all media in the region should work to strengthen and promote the rural development activities that centred the *woredas* (AMMA). It is, thus, safe to conclude that there is a PR-isation (political influence) on the medium. This is because the coverage given to rural development issues are incongruent with the government's plan as well as the editorial policies of the government's media.

Priority Areas of the Medium

Placement of the News

Inclusion of the news in the headlines

The priority given to rural development news will be identified by the placement of the news story in the evening news program. In the news

presentation, the prominence or the significance of the news items is understood based on the placement of the story. This is because news items which are presented as headlines do not have similar weight as news presented at the end of the news time. Lund (1925) enunciated a law of primacy, stating that the side of an issue presented first will have greater effectiveness than the side presented afterwards. Gans (2004) also stated that if large numbers of people are affected by the story, journalists tend to consider the story as important one. Similarly, Miller (2005) points out that “the media agenda influences the public agenda not by saying such an issue is important in an overt way but by giving more time to that issue and by giving it more prominent time” (p. 271).

This shows that if a specific issue is included in the headlines, it is possible to say it has been given more attention than the stories that are not included in the headlines and how the media agenda influences public agenda by providing a pertinent position to the issue. To identify the placement, the researchers set six categories which include: Inclusion of the news in the Headlines, Short News, News in Brief, Direct Agenda, News on Other Regional States, and others.

Figure 2: Distribution of the types of news versus the Inclusion of News in the Headline

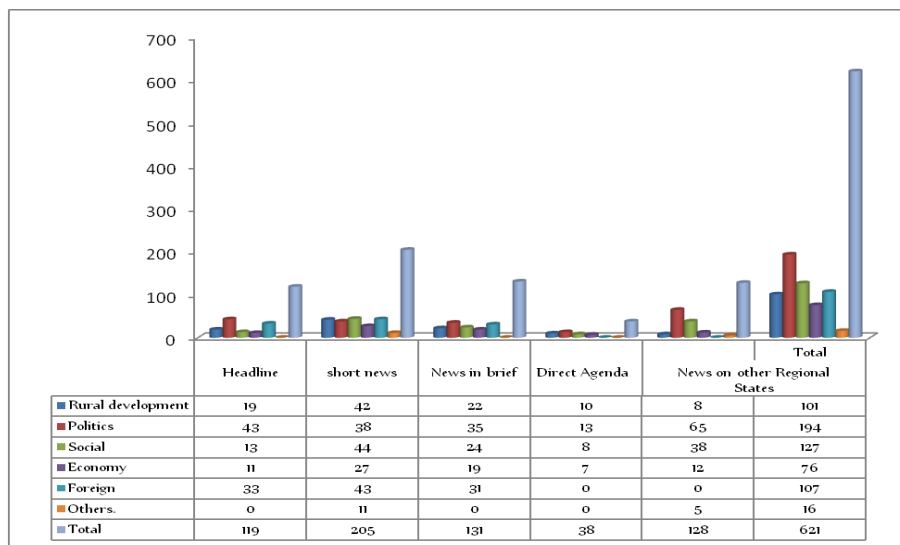


Figure 2 above clearly shows that only 19 (18.8%) of rural development news items were included in the headlines. Most of the rural development

news items, i.e., 42 (41.6%), were presented in the short news category. The rest developmental news items were included in the news in brief with 22 (21.8%), direct agenda with 10 (9.9%) and news on other regional states with 8 (7.9%) items. This means from the total of 101 transmitted rural development issues, 82 (81.2%) were not included in the headlines. Only the remaining 19 (18.8%) of news items were included in the headlines. This indicates that the emphasis given to the rural development issues was not as such significant as politics or foreign news.

Running Order of News

Radio can further emphasise the importance of a subject by its placement in the running order of the news program. Items presented at the very beginning of the news bulletin are considered to have greater influence than those coming later (McLeish, 2005). Moreover, according to McCombs and Shaw (1977), media agenda establishes the position and the length of story as the primary criteria of prominence. Some findings suggest that media priorities are also part of the agenda-setting function and may affect people's behaviour.

Table 1: Distribution of News in terms of the Running Order of Stories during the sample 40 days in the three months

Running order of news	Type of the news												Remark
	Rural Dev't		Politics		Social		Economy		Foreign		Others		
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
1	8	7.9%	14	7.2%	11	8.7%	7	9.2%					
2	7	6.9%	15	7.7%	13	10.2%	5	6.6%					
3	9	8.9%	11	5.7%	12	9.4%	8	10.5%					
4	8	7.9%	17	8.8%	9	7.1%	6	7.9%					
5	8	7.9%	16	8.2%	8	6.3%	8	10.5%					
6	5	5.0%	16	8.2%	9	7.1%	8	10.5%			2	12.5%	
7	7	6.9%	13	6.7%	9	7.1%	6	7.9%	5	4.7%			
8	9	8.9%	9	4.6%	8	6.3%	5	6.6%	6	5.6%	1	6.3%	
9	8	7.9%	9	4.6%	8	6.3%	4	5.3%	6	5.6%			

10	7	6.9%	10	5.2%	7	5.5%	2	2.6%	5	4.7%	2	12.5%	
11	4	4.0%	10	5.2%	5	3.9%	3	3.9%	6	5.6%	3	18.8%	
12	3	3.0%	12	6.2%	6	4.7%	1	1.3%	6	5.6%	2	12.5%	
13	4	4%	9	4.6%	4	3.1%	1	1.3%	8	7.5%	3	18.8%	
14	3	3%	10	5.2%	4	3.1%	2	2.6%	8	7.5%	1	6.3%	
15	3	3%	11	5.7%	5	3.9%	2	2.6%	7	6.5%			
16	2	1.9%	8	4.1%	4	3.1%	3	3.9%	9	8.4%			
17	3	3%	3	1.5%	2	1.6%	2	2.6%	11	10.3%	2	12.5%	
18	3	3%	1	0.5%	2	1.6%	1	1.3%	11	10.3%			
19					1	0.8%	1	1.3%	10	9.3%			
20									7	6.5%			
21							1	1.3	2	1.9%			
Total	101	100%	194	100%	127	100%	76	100%	107	100%	16	100%	

The above table shows that the running order of the news items in the news' schedule while broadcasting. In the forty days of the sample time, 621 news items were aired. From these news items, 14 political news items were aired at the very beginning of the news. This means that for 14 days political items were given the priority of the station news items in the running order. As it can be seen in the table, on average, 35.6% of the political news was placed among the first four stories of the news cue sheet.

Rural development issues were placed as the first story with only eight times in the study time. Although the numbers of rural development news items are relatively medium during the sample time, rural development news was the third category next to politics and social to be broadcast first. 7.5% of the forty days of the rural development news items were aired at the very beginning of the transmission of the news. Media professionals agree that when stories are read first, the implication is that they are considered the most important stories that the media institution has to broadcast at the time.

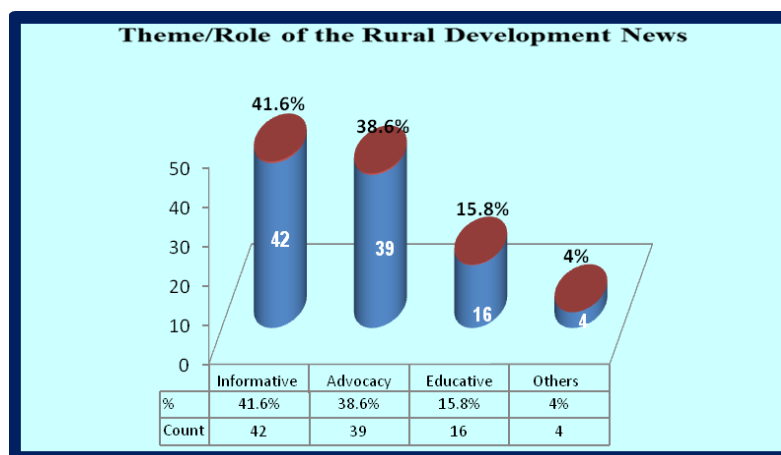
Further, an interview respondent (Informant 4) responded in this regard as "the media usually gives more emphasis to government and political agendas". The Amhara Radio's performance as an agenda-setter for the

public on rural development, when seen from McCombs and Shaw's views (1977), can be levelled as poor. Moreover, covering 12,328 (16.95%) seconds of the total 72,744 seconds, 101 news items of the total 621 news of which most are listed in the middle of the running order may not be a guarantee in realizing the role of the media to promote and support the development plan of the region in particular and the country in general.

Theme/Role of the News

This category refers to the central message or the dominant theme of the news. According to Ali (2000), informing and/or educating people about the need of national development is the widely accepted role of the mass media. The role of rural development issues is discussed within these three categories:

Figure 3: Theme/Role of Development News

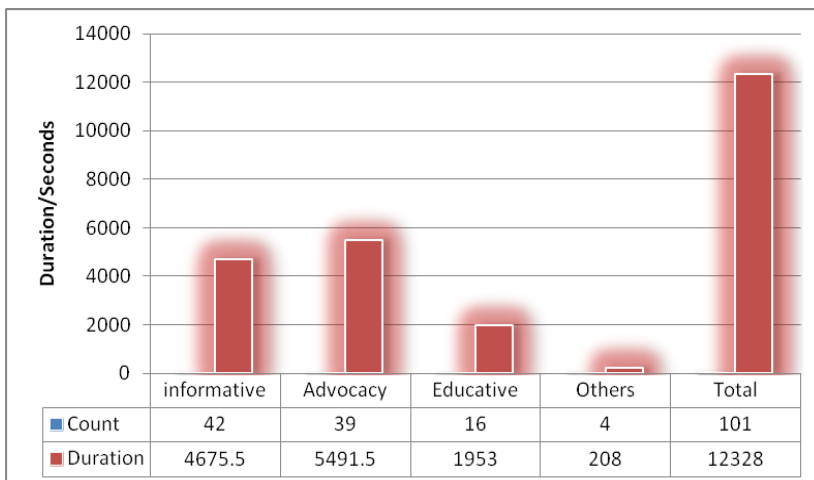


Informative role of the news was the dominant role, with 42 (41.6%) news items. On the other hand, 39 (38.6%) items had an advocacy role, 16 news (15.8%) items had an educative role and 4 news (4%) had others category role of the media. The research finding of this paper revealed that most items of Amhara Radio news have more of informative 42 (41.6%) and advocacy 39 (38.6%) roles. However, its educative role is insignificant with 16 (15.8%) items. The rural development issues covered during the sample period were largely aimed to inform and did not focus on explaining topics in a more educative manner. According to

Waisbord (2006), news items that have some relation to development are highly criticized in that they are not educative but purely informative. They are also often not well framed. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the Amhara Radio's evening news is not playing the role of educating the people in general and the rural community in particular about rural development topics. Similarly, an interviewee (Informant 2) reinforces the issue as follows:

Our news mostly focuses on informing the listener against educating. Once I heard a farmer commenting us by saying 'you told us the use of modern bee-hives and made us to buy the hive from our cooperatives. But we do not know how to transfer the colony of the bees from the traditional one to the modern bee-hives'. The journalist, as my opinion, had to invite an agriculture professional guest for interview so as to explain about.

Figure 4: Role of the RD News versus Time Duration Cross Tabulation



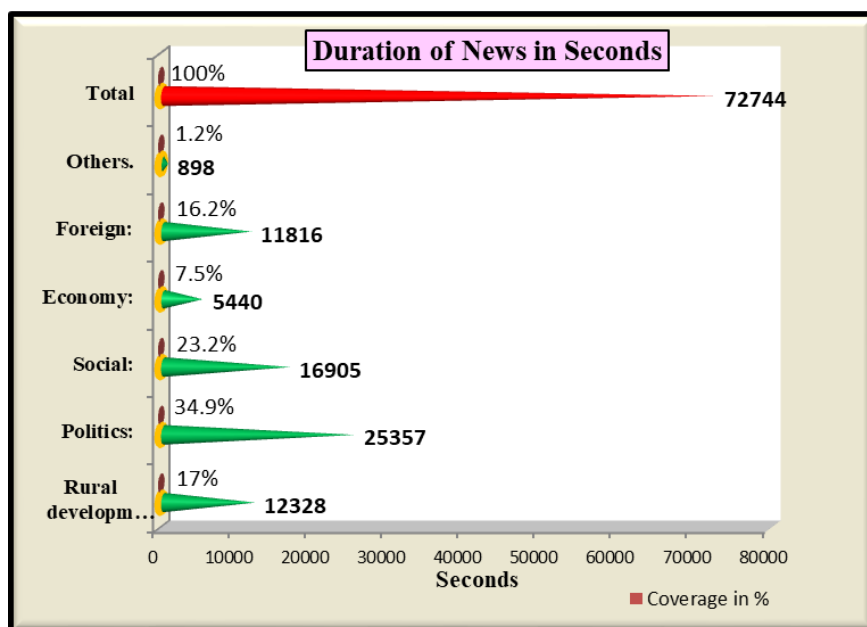
The above figure shows that the comparison between the role of news in relation to their duration. While 42 news of informative role took 4675.5 seconds, 39 news of advocacy role took 5491.5 seconds. The 16 news of educative role, on the other hand, took 1953 seconds. This shows that the informative and advocacy roles of the news have got better attention both in their amount/count and their duration. From these findings, one can conclude that AR is giving much emphasis to the advocacy and

informing role of news, which is equivalent to simply telling, rather than educating the rural society on its coverage.

Duration of the Rural Development News

This category helps to know how long coverage a specific issue is given in the news hour. This section classified the findings of the data in relation to the duration given to each news items from March 20, 2017 to May 21, 2017.

Figure 5: Duration of News in Seconds



As displayed in the above figure, the total of 621 news items transmitted in forty sample days' evening news in AR, covered a total air time of 72,744 seconds (20 hours, 12 minutes and 24 seconds). Political news stories were given the dominant place in the frequency distribution of the coverage. The same happened in relation to time duration. The political issues have got 25,357 (34.9%) seconds during the period of three months. This meant AR devoted 34.9% of its news hours to political issues of the whole time of the evening news hours of the specified sample time (6 pm.).

The social issue news item took the second rank with 16,905 (23.2%) seconds. Foreign news items were recorded in the fourth with 11,816

(16.2%) seconds. Rural development news followed after the political and social news with 12,328 (17%) seconds and was listed in the third rank. The findings here show that the rural development issue, which is repeatedly mentioned as the most core issue for the realization of GTP, received only 17% of the whole evening news time. Griffin (2006) states that if an issue receives a frequent and large coverage in the media, listeners will give due attention to it. McLeish (2005) also commented that people will discuss what they hear on the radio and be less likely to be concerned with topics not already given wide coverage.

Table 2: Distribution of Frequency of News versus Time Duration in Seconds Cross Tabulation

No	Types of News	Frequency		Time Duration	
		Count	%	Seconds	%
1	Rural development	101	16.3%	12328	17%
2	Politics	194	31.2%	25357	34.9%
3	Social	127	20.5%	16905	23.2%
4	Economics	76	12.2%	5440	7.5%
5	Foreign	107	17.2%	11816	16.2%
6	Others	16	2.6%	898	1.2%
Total		621	100.0%	72744	100%

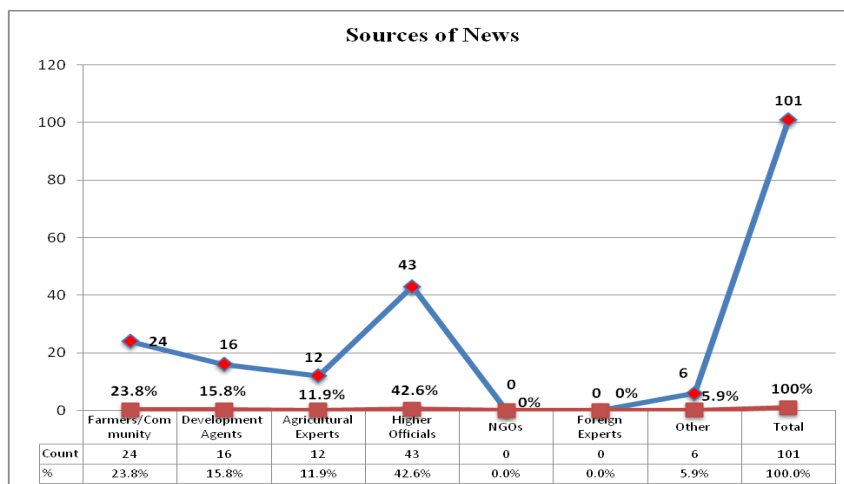
As the above table shows, the relationship between the frequency of news and the time duration they took has almost a positive relationship. When we look at the frequency of news and the time duration they took, it was found out that politics and social news items ranked first and second, respectively, in both cases having a state of symmetry/invariance.

Hence, from the findings, it is possible to say that the AR, as an agenda-setter, gives limited time for rural development compared to the total time of the news items as well as to the concern given to the issue by the government GTP and its editorial policy.

Sources of the Rural Development News

Identifying the sources helps to know who the main and common sources of the rural development news stories are and to identify whether and to what extent the rural communities are being used as sources by the radio journalists. Thus, for this research, it is particularly interesting to study whether the origin of the information given in the development news stories came from any of the following sources:

Figure 6: Frequency of Sources of the News



As shown in figure 6 above, most of the rural development news of the medium was found to rely on higher officials of the government with 43 (42.6%) news items. Unlike its giving due importance to government higher officials, the medium did not give due consideration for the news sources of community, development agents, agricultural experts and others with 24 (23.8%), 16 (15.8%), 12 (11.9%) and 6 (5.9%) news items, respectively. The remaining other sources of the news accounted for 6(5.9%) news items. This seems usual, for a considerable number of studies have shown that journalists mainly rely on official sources (Panos, 2005).

One of the key interview informants (Informant 3) explained as follows:

It's observed that the news obtained from the government bodies is not really true, and the reason why I said this is the case once I have encountered. Two months ago, information obtained from Agriculture Bureau with regard to the list of model farmers to be awarded was different from the fact on the ground. The Bureau

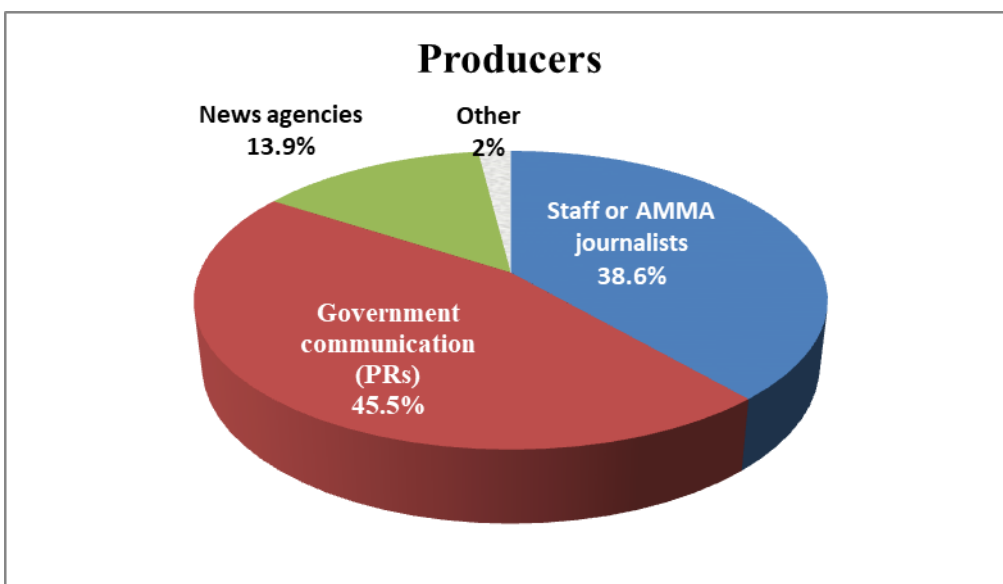
reported that there is a model farmer in Oromiya Nationality Zone of the Regional State. Unexpectedly the said model farmer is found having an ox with three khat plants, when a reporter arrived on the actual place. I know that this is against the credibility of news value.

This shows us that, the main actors of rural development activities, i.e., farmers or rural community, development agents and agricultural experts, have not been the source as compared to government officials or political appointees. The credibility of the news of AR was in doubt, for that news is not what journalists think, but what their sources say and mostly the credibility of the news of the reporters is highly dependent on their sources (Jorgensen, et. al., 2009).

Here, development of communication is not only the dissemination of an innovation of new ideas that is full of promise by officials, but the grassroots expression of its needs, and participation by putting the emphasis on the needs and the viewpoints of the individual and groups at the grassroots level becomes the key for promoting development (Yoon, 2004). However, the findings of the current revealed that the main stakeholders of the rural development are passive actors in providing information. The findings indicated that the information flow goes from the officials and other top agricultural experts to farmers and other rural dwellers as a top-down flow of information. Yet, according to Robin, this one-way flow of information in the radio broadcasts limits the use of radio in rural development to very specific aspects (Robin, 2001).

Who Set the Agenda?

This category helps to see whether and how often the journalists of the station set agenda. Is the news story initiated by staff or AMMA journalists, government communication (PRs), and/or news agencies?

Figure 7: Producers of Rural Development News

As can be seen from figure 7 above, 39 (38.6%) news items were produced by the staff/AMMA reporters, and 46 (45.5%) items were produced by government communication (PRs) in each level. The rest were produced by news agencies with 14 (13.9%) items and by others with 2 (2%), respectively. According to Boyd, the biggest source of news for any radio or TV station should be its reporting staff (Boyd, 2001).

However, from the data analysis of the current study, we can observed that government communication (PRs) found in each hierarchy were the dominant reporters of news on rural development issues with the number 39 out of 101 news. This number covers 38.6% out of all rural development news in news production of AR.

From this, we can conclude that although the importance of collecting information is valuable for the station, the majority of the news items of rural development were prepared by government communication (PRs). Hence, the role of the staff journalists was not more than that of other reporting agents. This, in turn, will affect the objectivity and credibility of the news. However, the effect would briefly be discussed in the next sub-topic.

The Status of the Medium in Reportage of Rural Development against the Principles of Development Journalism

As we have mentioned earlier, the criteria for development news help to determine whether or not a news item can potentially contribute to development should not be based on the source of the message but rather on the characteristics of the message itself (Donsbach, 2008). In addition, as it’s explained in the above discussion (see, page 7), Shah (1996) and others have described the basic characteristics of effective development news. Hence, this section of the analysis aimed to analyse and evaluate the news of Amhara Radio against the characteristics of effective development news given by Shah (1996) so as to address the third objective of this research.

Figure 8: Evaluation of Rural Development News against the Principles of Effective Development News

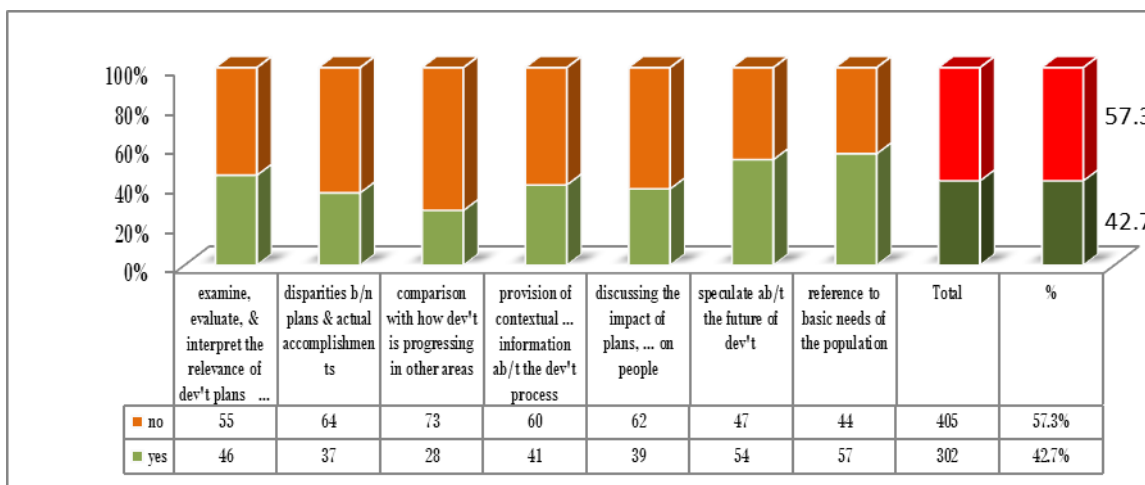


Figure 8 summarizes the comparison of rural development news aired with the principles of effective development news. The sum totals of news that fulfilled the principles and failed to fulfil are also indicated in the count to help to find the per cent.

Approaches of Reporting Rural Development News

The major approaches of reporting rural development news by Amhara Radio are presented below.

1. Dominated by Public Relations and Success-Oriented

The findings of this research showed that the approaches to the production of news are related to issues of political and economic structure and control. This means that news tends to reflect the views of the political elite, at the expense of reflecting the truth. Schudson (1996) describes that since the most important characteristics of public relations are geared to working for the positive image of the organization, they can't unearth any information that may hurt the image of the organization. Besides, Salter (2005) corroborated Schudson's agreement by saying:

Holistic reality is not good for public relations. A client doesn't employ a public relations agent to tell the truth, regardless of the personal orientation of the agent. Neither does the client pay a public relations firm to represent the interests of their opponents. Hence, Public Relations serve the interest of the public with the implied intention of serving its organization interest first. This is why organizations hire Public Relation practitioners (Salter, 2005, p.12).

These arguments show that journalism and PR are reasonably poles apart because both of them strive for different purposes. One of the informants (Informant 3) agreed that Public Relations are the image builders (success-oriented) of the government by saying:

Public relations focus only on the success of the organization. By any means you cannot get negative information from PRs. Even if you raised it by yourself, he/she will tell you the means they have used to solve the problems. They show you the capacity they have in solving problems. So, they are there in the organization to make you believe the positive aspect of their organization.

Besides, the Editorial Policy declared it under the principles of integrity and accountability of the medium as follows: "to ensure integrity of news and accountability of the medium, any reporter of the medium should abstain from covering issues that are difficult to confirm their truthfulness with the intention of getting money only (Art. 3.1.3 Sub-art 3.1.3.2) and issues which are in connection with government offices and organizations should be proved [of] their reliability from different directions prior to putting on air (Art. 3.1.5 Sub-art 3.1.5.2)". However,

the practice is against the said editorial policy. The researcher probed the key respondents of the study regarding why they are dominated by government sources and how they cover stories in their news reporting.

Informant 4 states that:

In the first place, to do a critical reporting you need to have journalistic independence. And when you follow you need to select news and source of the news by yourself. However, both news and its sources are selected by our bosses who are part of the government. The source we contact is also part of the government. So, there is no way to do critical reporting. Sometimes when you bring critical news, they can edit it the way they want it.

Hence, from the above data we can conclude that the news coverage of the air waves of the medium is dominated by public relations and relied most on success stories mainly originated from government sources.

2. Top to Down Approach and Event-Oriented

In addition, the findings of the research depicted that the medium is practicing a top to down communication approach; an approach that usually favours gathering information from government sources and addressing the same to the public without investigation. However, development journalism encourages two-way communication with sufficient opportunity for the public to be in the news by way of interacting with journalists pertinent to development activities. In other words, the public is not mere passive recipient of message but also source of information (Negeri, 2013).

It is also found that the news of the medium was in favour of covering events. The journalists simply copy the press release, and rarely add some speeches on it, and report it. Most of the key informants of the research agreed that events are given more coverage than the process. They said as follows:

Informant 5 explained:

Although I am well aware of process of reporting, they are obliged to emphasize event reporting mainly because our editor-in-chief prefers wider coverage of successful events which seems

our guiding task of reporting and as a result it is taken as a custom.

This shows that the airwave of the medium is dominated by public relations, and it is following success-oriented and downward approaches, in favour of events against processes as well. In many cases, the public relations' press releases without any evaluation or modification are broadcast as news.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

As the findings of the study revealed the Amhara Radio is not in a position to promote rural development which is government's top priority and considered being the central pillar of economic policy and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) (MoFED, 2003). What is clear from the findings is that most of the issues of rural development stories were not frequent in the news agenda. In other words, the newsroom of Amhara Radio gives little coverage for rural development issues vis-à-vis the 85% of the population living in rural areas as an agrarian population.

In addition, the findings showed that the Amhara Radio fails to become the voice of the voiceless since nearly half of the covered news of rural development news, i.e., 43 (42.6%) stories, were sourced from or supplied by government communication and public relations officials. Reporters are reporting government press releases and speeches but giving little attention to detailed analysis, interpretation, or critical evaluation of development projects, policies, or problems. Hence, the medium is the mouthpiece of the ruling party, for it relies dominantly on public relations and other government reports as development news. The radio news is dominated by public relations reporting, success-oriented stories, in favour of events, and followed top-down approaches. It is clearly observed that public relations has become the dominant sources of news. It is safe to conclude that journalism is under the shade of public relations. Such "PR-isation" of mass media jeopardises the profession and hence the medium becomes a tool of propaganda.

Recommendations

Congruent to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Rural development news needs to be aired for the primary aim of promoting rural development, including focusing attention on the development needs of the rural people.
- The medium needs to incorporate diversified views in the rural development news sources because AR dominantly uses government sources (PR) and reflects the voices of government officials. The medium should be the voice of the rural mass, not public relations officers and power holders. The trend of the “PR-isation” of mass media should be stopped or curbed.
- The medium needs to work in line with the principles of an effective professional development journalism, and be reengineered for the primary aim of monitoring development policies and projects, including focusing attention on the development needs of the rural people.
- It is advisable to ensure its watchdog role for development that is effectively established on the principles of professional development journalism so as to ensure the change of the community.

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