

Column Corruption - A social disease • Part 136

The role of the media in promoting good governance and inclusive democracy

The media is a vehicle for the written and spoken word that can include newspapers, voice and video in various digital formats, in providing increased transparency about issues influencing decision-making.

Governance is in essence decision-making and good governance includes the way that decisions are made in corporates, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), public institutions and the community. In increasing good governance, the media is also promoting public participation in decision-making and in effect democracy. Inclusive democracy is embracing consensus as one of the pillars of good governance. An example of good governance and inclusive democracy is the vision and objectives of the Harambee Prosperity Plan.

With an increase in the popularity of social media such as Facebook and



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Twitter, the role of the media has increased and we are just experiencing the beginning of this exponential increase.

Developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) is already experiencing how social media platforms are changing politics and democracy. For example, the 2017 USA presidential election where Facebook has been used to provide a winning edge to Donald Trump as revealed in April 2018 by Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and owner of Facebook. Facebook played a critical role in triggering the Arab Spring in Middle East countries, e.g. Egypt. One of the most outstanding 'shockers' for the USA and the United Kingdom (UK) military and diplomatic services has been the publishing of 391 832 documents about the Iraq War by Julian Assange of WikiLeaks (WikiLeaks, 2010). These documents exposed the unaccountable deaths of thousands of civilians.

WikiLeaks made the Iraq war the most public war in history. This extreme case of public reporting underlined the value of the media in increasing transparency as one of the pillars of good governance to expose unaccountable abuse of power and stimulating social consciousness (Coetzee).

Namibia

Closer to home, a number of media reporting needs to be discussed as follows. *The Patriot*, a weekly has been halted by a court order on 13 April 2018 from publishing information about extensive properties including farms owned by the Namibia Central Intelligence Service. Outdated apartheid legislation, the Protection of Information Act of 1982, will most probably be used to prevent *The Patriot* from revealing the said mentioned assets (Namibian Sun).

Another example is the public outcry about the projected cost of the proposed parliament building that contributed to the temporary halt of proceeding with tenders. The SME Bank corruption

involved prominent politically connected people. The media and public outcry about alleged mismanagement of funds by the board and management probably contributed to the liquidation of the bank and starting of investigations by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

A Namibian Facebook example is the video of EES on Facebook in campaigning that independence Day be used as a national clean-up day of especially our urban garbage and the response in the social media contributing to the President's announcement (later retracted) that Workers' Day be used for cleaning up Namibia.

The media played a prominent role in exposing unethical business practices, e.g. corruption at the GIFF as part of several black empowerment (BEE) deals in an estimated N\$660 million invested in "dodgy investments" between late 1990s and early 2000 (Tjirera & Links). The government dragged its feet and initially denied foul play, but after media pressure, a public outcry and appeals from the Namibian National Workers Union during 2011, a commission of enquiry was appointed to investigate allegations (Coetzee).

Whistle-blowing Reporting by the media enables an institution to build public trust by developing anti-corruption strategies (The UN Global Compact) such as whistle-blowing. If a culture of internal whistle-blowing is not nurtured in an institution, the last resort of frustrated employees is to blow the whistle externally by using the media to rectify unaccountable and unsustainable corporate governance practices. The media exposes corporatocracy, meaning the interconnected beneficialiation of banks, governments and multi-national corporations (MNCs), who are (to generalise) abusing employees. External whistle-blowing by employees about institutional wrongdoing to the media provides the 'sunlight' that exposes questionable and unaccountable business practices, as well as board and political interference in operational issues of offices/ministries/agencies such as public enterprises (PEs). Transparency by the media is stimulating accountability, the pivot around which all good governance rotates.

Critical role

From the discussion that focuses on reporting by the media abroad and in Namibia, it can be deduced with certainty that the media is playing a critical role in increasing transparency, exposing corruption and advancing good governance.

The debate should not be if the media is advancing good governance, but rather: How much more can be the impact of the media in advancing governance and democracy if the Namibian media to focus more on investigative journalism?

For investigative journalism to flourish, public officials need to be much more transparent and responsive in their communication with the media. The media can be a friend to market good governance and attract investment and tourists.

Given the exponential advancement in technology in future, the role of social media platforms is due to increase transparency beyond our current imagination. In this process, the social media will play a prominent role in shaping accountability, a pivot of governance, governments and advancing inclusive democracy for the betterment of society. In the spirit of Harambee, let us support the media in providing accurate information in exposing questionable decision making.

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