COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

This paper analyses the positive and negative contributions of communication to governance. In theory, effective communication helps to promote good governance. The Governance strategies have been generally poor at integrating media and communication issues into their analysis, research and strategic plans. Good governance requires an inclusive public space based on informed dialogue and debate, a positive relationship between communication and governance seems plausible. Humans' first efforts at communication grew from the pointing and pantomiming our ancestors developed. In "History of Communication," Michael Tomasello suggests that those primitive communication technologies provided the basis for cooperation among early humans. Prevailing views on good governance centre upon concepts of capability, accountability and responsiveness. They focus on the need for the full participation of citizens and civil society actors in governance and are predicated on the effective flow of information and dialogue between citizen, governments and other actors. By situating communication, information dissemination and dialogue as key components of governance a positive correlation between communication and good governance is tacitly assumed. The aim of this paper is to examine the role (both positive and negative) that communication plays in promoting effective governance by analysing available evidence and highlighting specific case studies, evaluations reports and academic articles detailing the impact of communication on governance. The purpose is to move beyond anecdote and conjecture, to review the evidence base and thereby to provide a reliable basis for policies and programmes on communication for good governance.

Keywords: ICT, Citizenship, Tool, Effectiveness, Governance.

Introduction

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have profound implications for good governance, placing major players (policy makers and executors) under increased observance, leading to enhanced state conduct and more responsible policies. Lack of access to the information is dangerous to the ruled and the rulers. ICT is a major building block for sustainable development and a major driving force for economic prosperity. It allows government and the citizens to participate in governance in a rapidly changing world where democratic ideals are increasingly changed by access to varied and developing technologies and ideas (Ertmer, 1999).

Governance strategies have been generally poor at integrating media and communication issues into their analysis, research and strategic plans. This article considers the reasons for this, some of which are rational. It argues that the impact of changing media and communication landscapes on governance outcomes is increasing, that the way in which the media is conceptualized in relationship to governance needs a rethink and that governance policy needs to find better ways of prioritizing it.

United Nations in 2003 evaluated existing work to measure ICT development from different sources, including academia, the private sector and international organizations (UNDP, UNIDO, OECD and ITU) and concluded that African and South Asian countries are classified as falling behind, Latin American and transition economies as keeping up and OECD countries and South-East Asian Tigers as getting ahead. However, this classification masks considerable diversity in individual country experience, with Arab and "Island States" as notable successes shaving good connectivity despite less competitive policy measures. Strong positive correlations are observed between connectivity and access and, to a lesser extent, connectivity and competitive telecommunications policy.

Development Communication
Communications for governance should be seen as part of the wider concept of Development Communication often referred to as communication for development or devcomm. The World Bank defines Development Communication as "a process that facilitates the sharing of knowledge in order to achieve positive change in the field of development. It is about the effective dissemination of information and the professional facilitation of dialogue among stakeholders". The Rome Consensus on Communication for Development defines communication for development as "a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication". By distinguishing development communications as clearly distinct to public communication or public relations (involving one way communication from government to the citizenry) development communication is seen as a democratic approach to communication by promoting two-way dialogue between citizens and the government. In terms of activities, development communication includes: face to face communication or information activities such as counseling or extension visits; community level communications such as theatre, role-playing, workshops, posters and other print materials; TV, radio, film and video; internet and email communication programmes; and telecommunications based projects.

Governance actors focus on supporting effective institutions. Where governance strategies do include the media, they are often designed to support more effective and sustainable media institutions. This focus is important and necessary but limited. Some of the greatest media and communication changes shaping governance outcomes are being played out at the societal rather than institutional level. Media support strategies need to adjust to this reality. The transformation in people's access to media, information and communication continues to accelerate with both positive and negative consequences for governance. It is not clear that these changes are leading to more informed societies which, for most governance actors, are why a free and plural media is most valued. Supply driven strategies (such as improving

access to governmental and institutional information and data) are not necessarily being complemented by increased citizen demand for such information

Development Communication and Governance
The World Bank demonstrates how communication (defined as citizen engagement underpinned by access to high quality information) can act as an important contributor to good governance, depicting this link in a virtuous circle of transparency. In this mode, information reveals the actions of policy makers, facilitates evaluation and monitoring, activism rises, and with it the level of public debate. Policy becomes more contestable and citizens are motivated by the possibility of holding the government accountable. Communication with the government becomes a two-way flow, generating further demands and more reliable information. The virtuous circle is completed as government practices become more open and more responsive to citizens.

The term 'governance' is not recent. It has been in existence as long as human civilization. Succinctly, 'governance' can simply be defined as the art of decision-making and the process by which policies are enforced or otherwise. Governance is put into use in diverse contexts including local governance, national governance, international governance and corporate governance. Governance is the mechanism of decision-making and the manner by which decisions are executed. The process of governance is centered on the actions or inaction of formal and informal actors involved in policy-making and executing the policies made. It is also about the formal and informal structures that are provided to arrive at and execute the policies.

Good governance is a concept applied in development literature to explain how public institutions conduct public responsibilities and control public resources in order to ensure the realization of constitutional rights. The term is used with great flexibility. Depending on the situation and the prevailing objective sought, good governance encompasses respect for human rights, people's participation, the rule of law, political pluralism. Other factors include transparency and accountability, efficient institutions, effective public service sector, legitimacy to power, knowledge based society, provision of effective education, political empowerment of people, equity, and attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance.

The term good governance developed as a standard to compare less developed economies or political entities with viable economies and political organizations promoting good governance in all its aspects. This is realized by promoting the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of institutions and a fight against corruption, as imperative elements of a framework within which economies can flourish. Corruption in governance is the result of ineffective governance of the economy, more of too much regulations or too little regulation (Agere, 2000).

The Role of Media in Governance
The role of the media and freedom of expression in relation to governance is difficult to summarize, with debates reaching back millennia. As Francis Fukuyama documents, Emperor Qin – the founder of the first unified Chinese state in the third century B.C. – saw control of

ideas as fundamental to his state building project. "If such conditions are not prohibited, the Imperial power will decline above and partisanships will form below", wrote Li Si, Qin's Chancellor in 213 B.C. "It is expedient that these be prohibited. Your servant requests that all persons possessing works of a literature, the Shith (Book of Odes), the Shu (the Book of History) and the discussions of the various philosophers should destroy them" (Fukuyama, 2011: p. 130). Four hundred Confucian scholars who resisted were reportedly buried alive. Two millennia later, the extreme opposite approach to state building was articulated by Thomas Jefferson in his famous quote, "If I had to choose between government without newspapers, and newspapers without government, I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter". Any development discussion on the role of media in governance is inextricably enmeshed in a set of debates about effectiveness, and a set of debates about values. The debates about effectiveness tend to revolve around the tension between the efficiency and stability of government (with open liberalized media systems often being accused of undermining both), or alternatively around the accountability, sustainability and responsiveness of any governance system (with a free media often being upheld as a guarantor of all three). The debates about values are about how much any governance system should enshrine a respect for human rights and dignity, political freedom, and democracy. This brief article does not try to reconcile these tensions but does argue that any attempt to deal with the role of media in development does need to ensure that such tensions, often submerged, are surfaced, examined and interrogated.

The support for the concept that communication can promote good governance is by no means universally accepted. Indeed, there are cases where communications can serve to protect poor governance rather than promote good governance, for example, if communication acts as a protector of the state rather than the voice of the people or if communication is subject to elite capture and is used to voice the views of one segment of society at the expense of other people's rights and freedom. There is also an issue over the sheer multiplicity of voices now emerging in many countries presenting governments with a challenge of mediating between conflicting demands and adopting sustainable and effective outcomes. In addition, there are problems of causality where the link between good governance and communication is thought to be reciprocal - effective communication can promote good governance, but equally a freer government can promote more effective participation and communication. The direction of causality is not straightforward.

Shahi Tharoor highlights some of these issues in Integrating Approaches to Good Governance, Press Freedom and Intercultural Tolerance. Referring explicitly to the media, she demonstrates how a free media cannot always be seen as virtuous. Rather the media can be used as a substitute for democratic political expression and an irresponsible media or undue pressure from particular pressure groups can have a disastrous impact on politics. In her view, the establishment of an effective enabling environment for media is essential to establishing a sound positive correlation. Looking more broadly to communications, the World Bank similarly maintain that certain enabling factors are required to engender transparency, accountability and responsiveness. These include: the production and dissemination of good quality information; disclosure of information as a critical factor in turning information into a tool for civic accountability; an independent media; and an engaged civil society, in particular, civil society that is not subject to overbearing elite capture.

Good governance is concerned with the relationships between governments and business class; between governments and people; between elected officials and appointed officials and voters; between the legislature and executive arms; and between states institutions. Good governance is consensus oriented, participatory, respecting the rule of law, effective and efficient, accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable and inclusive. For the government to be considered good, it must be democratic and people-oriented. It must be responsive and inclusive not exclusive; it must be participatory not otherwise. Consequently, it must be transparent and open not close and it must promote the rule of law (Agere, 2000).

Political participation is a major pillar to good governance especially when there is the inclusion of both men and women. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate, lawful establishments or representatives. It is significant to indicate that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most disadvantaged in a nation would be taken into consideration in decision making. In this case, participation is electronic that has to do with the Internet, mobile phone, television and radio establishing economic, political and social priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the low-income earners and the disadvantaged are heard in decision making over the allocation of development resources.

Media and governance: an institutional or societal lens?

This problem is exacerbated by conceptual difficulties of defining what we mean by media. To take just two examples, do we use an institutional lens, looking only at those broadcast, print or online entities which have a clear organizational foundation and which clearly act, as a set of institutions in relation to the state or other loci of power? Or do we use a societal lens, looking at all the ways in which people actually access information and communicate in the 21st century? If the first, a governance support strategy would put in place a set of measures designed first and foremost to support the institutional independence, professionalism and sustainability of media in the country. If the second, a strategy would understand first and foremost how people were accessing information and using communication and, depending on what people (especially, perhaps, poor people) said they wanted (for example, more trusted and relevant news or platforms for debate), put in place a programme to support that. Whichever lens we look through reveals a picture of extraordinary change. The number, diversity and character of media institutions is exploding, especially in the developing world, sometimes releasing phenomenal and positive democratic energy, and sometimes resulting in highly polarized, factional and occasionally hate-filled public spheres. In Afghanistan, for example, the number of TV and radio stations has expanded by around 20% per year, and there are more than 75 terrestrial TV stations and 175 Fm radio stations. Growth in other countries, such as neighboring Pakistan, has been faster still.

Apart from promoting the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, ICT could provide less developed economies remarkable opportunities to transform, advance policy formulation and execution, and expand the spectrum of opportunities for the less privileged. It could also serve as the cornerstone of the process of knowledge networking, learning, telenetworking, knowledge codification, and science systems (Ajayi, 2000). ICT can be used to get access to global knowledge and communication with other communities. Notwithstanding, in many sections of less developing economies, ICT is accessible on a limited scale, and this raises

concerns about their ability to compete. ICT has become a subject of huge importance and concern throughout the world. Related studies have indicated that the considerable impact of the ICT transformation will revolve around the 'Digital Divide' equation. The most significant facet of the ICT challenge is the need to plan, design and implement a National Information Infrastructure (NII) as the engine of political and economic development.

Remarkable developments in the ICT sector, the increasing spread and now near ubiquity of mobile phones in Nigeria, the growing penetration and affordability of Internet services including broadband, and the emergence of innovative ICT applications in Kano indicate the huge potential development impact of ICT. Connecting the people to affordable access to voice, high-speed Internet and information networks; promoting the growth of ICT industries with a focus on ICT skills development; and transforming the delivery of public and private services across sectors through the strategic use of ICT for an increased development impact is the sure way the people can best be served. This potential could be more beneficial when the executive and legislative arms of government including the governor, commissioners and advisers use social media networks like Facebook and Twitter to interact with the people, to listen to their demands, needs and aspirations and to explain to them government positions

What Evidence Exists

There is a limited pool of empirical evidence that illustrates the impact and significance of communication in good governance with much of the material focusing on qualitative discussion, the theory of communication and good governance, and case study analysis. Moreover, much of the evidence available comes from communications practitioners seeking to demonstrate impact rather than objectively question outcomes. Susan Abbot, referring explicitly to the media sector, states that "the media development field lacks a clear evidence base that illustrates the impact and significance of its activities, training programmes and advocacy work." An additional problem exists whereby much material related to the role that communication can play in good governance doesn't refer explicitly to development communication but rather is subsumed within conventional analysis on governance taking the form of participatory analysis, civil society engagement, analysis of e-governance and the role of the internet.

This is changing with the increasing emergence of both qualitative and quantitative analysis to support the link between communication and Kaufmann's argument and the Governance Matters report remain contentious with many commentators continuing to question the efficacy of empirical analysis in governance and the accuracy of the analysis.

If good governance is a priority to achieve the development that the people wished for, democratic moves had to be introduced to reduce corruption and increase accountability. Whistleblowers Act, to enhance the freedom of the people to alert the public to corruption, and the Public Accounts Act to weekly report the activities of government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, in a bid to entrench transparency. These laws will strengthen the process of accountability and ensure transparency in the management of resources. These democratic ideals could be enhanced further if radio, television, websites are provided and strengthened in governance. Investment in democracy, good governance and transparency are magnet for development. Retrospectively, development can best be realized when

government strengthen and entrench democratic sound practices, and uphold good governance.

Conclusion

If we accept the view that governance requires an inclusive public space based on informed dialogue and debate – an environment in which voice and accountability are central – then it is clear, in theory at least, that communication must have a positive impact on good governance. This view is gaining credence amongst international donors, notably DFID and the World Bank, and as outlined above there is a growing evidence base underscoring the importance of communication in good governance.

Applying a differentiated approach, dependent on both the level of communication already in society and the form of governance in place is therefore vital to success. For example, in repressive environments with limited freedom to speak the media may prove to be the most effective way of generating a momentum for change whilst in more open environments formalized partnerships and citizen feedback systems, as in Bangalore, form a good basis for policy. Waisboard also emphasizes the need to integrate top down and bottom up approaches, by using communication at multiple levels including civil society, government and donors and the importance of combining media and interpersonal communication using media to raise awareness and knowledge of issues and interpersonal communication to induce behavioral change.

 The agenda for preparedness would include a strong emphasis on the development of the telecommunications and internet infrastructure. The government can achieve these goals when it declares access to ICT services as a fundamental human right of every citizen. It, therefore, makes sense for the government to deliberately guide its development through ICT policy, while at the same time making effective use of it in the performance of its legitimate functions and committed to deploring the sector to fast track the socio-economic development of the nation.

The Media can provide useful guidance on maximizing the impact of communication programmes on governance by advocating a differentiated approach to programme implementation. Waisboard for example, advocates using conventional mass media to reach large populations; social marketing to target specific groups; social mobilization to bolster participation; media advocacy to gain support from governments and donors; and popular folk media to generate dialogue and activate information networks.

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