



Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ICTD/2004/WG.2/CRP.1
17 November 2004
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - ESCWA

Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS -
Partnership for Building the Arab Information Society
Damascus, 22-23 November 2004

**ROLE AND PLACE OF THE MEDIA IN THE INFORMATION
SOCIETY**

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Role and Place of the Media in the Information Society

It is generally advocated that the complete implementation of the information society will ultimately bring about new social, political, economical and cultural values and perceptions in the world. For the moment, the latter has been witnessing historical transformations in the way ordinary people live, learn, work, communicate and do business. Further, the information society contributes to uphold rights and freedom, promote economic development and preserve cultural linguistic diversity worldwide. For this purpose, Information and communication technologies are the potential tools to secure sustainable development and achieve information society aims. Besides the computing facilities, Internet networks and telecommunications infrastructures requirements for the success of it, social, cultural and media infrastructures are fundamental elements to obtain the goals. Independent and pluralistic media are at the heart of the process, without them, it will be just nonsensical and worthless to speak about.

Pivotal Role in Deepening Democracy

Needless to remind the pivotal role of the media in deepening democratic governance and contributing to the building up of a democratic society. Moreover, they can play a positive role in promoting democratic values and practices if there is an adequate and an enabling environment that allows them to do so. Though, the role and place of the media depends on political, social and cultural context in which they operate. Their independence and autonomy from state, governments and other political pressures groups are key elements to preserve their impartiality and credibility. Often referred as the fourth branch of the governments, the media wield a real power and exercise an oversight function. Their key role in democratic governance has been recognised a long time ago and still remains fundamental principle of modern democracy in theory As well as in practice.

Use, Misuse and Abuse

Powerful or powerless, omnipotent or not, the media' role and place is differently seen and perceived. Sometimes, the media are defined in a contradictory manner. On one hand, they are perceived as a window of the world, tools and means for freedom of expression, press and opinion, enabling the promotion of democratic values, impartiality and fairness and on the other hand, as means to exert pressures, manipulation and distortion of truth and reality. They are seen as sources of conflicts and tensions. The media influence and pressure are just used, misused and abused. In practice, politicians and media professionals have developed controversial and tense relationship. Authorities accused them of defaming and depicting the reality, the media' reply is an attempt to limit and restrict their independence and freedom. Clashes and trials are ultimate solutions. Nevertheless, pluralism of ideas and diversity of views have enabled to bring more transparency and dynamism to the society. Activities of political parties are covered and reported and this give more impetus to militants and citizens to participate and defend democratic principles and values. The media as electronic, printing or multimedia contribute to the political decision-making process through airing opinions, organising debates and conferences. In doing so, they can succeed in enhancing democracy.

Genuine Pluralistic Media System

Obviously, the Arab world suffers from the inexistence of genuine and efficient media and political pluralism. The 2003 PNUD report is a pertinent illustration of the poor situation in education, knowledge and press freedom and democracy. My country Algeria as it is the case in my paper, has not reached yet the maturity age. It still remains in its late infancy, there are some indicators of politicians 's involvements to contribute to social and political life of their city. Generally, citizens appreciate that, agree and act positively in the local political life as the media through reportages and news encourage these initiatives and promote the emergence of civil society. In addition to their attempted role of mediating and building up strong and

confident relationship between civil society and political society or political parties, they are informing, educating, entertaining the public. Also they have social and moral responsibilities to ensure smooth and peaceful transition to pluralistic system with the aims of establishing a fair and democratic system where politicians are accountable to their voters and citizens and the media role is to strengthen the civil society and enable it to share and participate in the local, regional and national governance.

Changes to meet International Standards

As already described, the media attributes and characteristics in terms of independence and autonomy are prerequisite conditions for the implementation of the information society. They are considered essential for a global and inclusive information society as mentioned in the global plan of action. The media as a watchdog should play the role of the guardian of the public interest and inform citizens against wrongdoing and abuses. Therefore, the Arab world if he wants to have a say and play an active and positive role in the global information society needs to review its media policies to meet international standards.

1. Ownership Status

One of the main difficulties that face the media are the state monopoly and ownership. It has brought more harm and tensions than cohesion and harmony to the society as it excludes huge parts of the public to access. Examples of abuse are numerous and some media are just become the mouthpiece of decision makers and some economic pressures groups and lobbies. What is really harmful and regrettable is the time allocated to official and formal activities. The public media instead of serving public interest, is playing in the hands of those who hold powers. Obviously, viewers have not choices but to zap and change channels. Thus, to put an end to such situation, private media should be allowed and cohabit with the public one to have a balanced and fair coverage, enabling the public to air their concerns and voices.

It is noticed that only few Arab states have experienced a private media ownership. El Jazeera and MBC, for instance and despite some critics and grievances have to some extent managed to counter attack the western media (and mainly US) hegemony and domination. They can be considered as the flagship of the Arab media. I don't know how many of you do agree with me?, but it will be ridiculous and unfair to accept and be imposed one sided picture of the events in any society, nation or world. Indeed, many voices in one global world should be the agreed rules to enable different views and opinions to be expressed, listened and understood.

2. Competition

Fair competition, transparency, honesty and fairness values should prevail if the Arab world wants to play a key role in the world affairs and if the whole world aspire to build up a strong and equitable information society. If these principles are not respected by all the players, I am not really confident on the future under the new information society umbrella. Competition rules should apply everywhere to secure a transparent and an open media system.

Economic and political liberalisation have ended media monopolies in many countries, there has been explosion of dynamic and creative independent media and far more freedom and pluralism as reported by Global Knowledge Partnership.

3. Financing and Funding Patterns

Issues of licensing and funding criteria, fees system, fairness, censorship, programmes content and schedule, language, programmes imports and advertising rules are parts of the required rules to be observed.

4. Credibility and Confidence

The credibility and confidence of the Algerian media for instance has been eroded and it takes a long time to recover and gain the public trust. Also, present organisational structures, programmes contents quality, news and current affairs editorial dependence illustrate poor marks if an evaluation of the public service broadcasting' efficiency, credibility and impartiality is to be carried out. The present social, economic and political conditions have been obstructing and deterring factors for broadcasting performance improvement and pluralism. It is Thomas' theory where the image is used as a political legitimacy tool and proof. What is reported and portrayed by television is legitimate and what is not reported and ignored is obviously illegitimate. Appearances on television are influential and powerful. Their perception is too powerful and the phenomenon can be observed on the screen. The culture of image has lead to tyrannical attitudes and policies. I am sure what applies to the Algerian case can be extrapolate to so many Arab states. And as I said, still only a handful of countries has embarked on the democratic process and media pluralism.

5. Public Service Values

Accountability, availability, impartiality, fairness and ethics and social responsibilities are the main media public service values and principles. Indeed, these are some of the changes which should be introduced in the media domain in order to meet international standards and subsequently participate to the efforts to erect the information society. The Arab world without ignoring its particular and specific values and beliefs and through a pluralistic media system can contribute to build up a strong and efficient system that enable citizens to be part of the global world. It will be regrettable for the Arab world to be left out of the stream of information society development.

Conclusion

Once these changes are introduced in the media policies and strategies, therefore it will not be difficult for the media to play a crucial role in achieving the objectives of the WSIS, building an inclusive information society, reducing poverty and digital divide gap, securing freedom in cyberspace and cyber security, building up peace and social consensus. In fact, the declaration of Principles and Plan of Action during the Geneva summit have referred to the media as having an important role in promoting awareness and enthusiasm for information and communication technologies. Indeed, the media are considered the most effective means of achieving the WSIS objectives. After all, they are seen the most important vehicles for information, knowledge and communication, and ultimately have the capacity to promote and build the information society through channelling civil societies concerns and grievances, airing public worries, debating policies, holding governments accountability and monitoring progress towards the implementation of the information society.
