

The Role of Media to Fight Against Corruption

Jeevan Singh Rajak

Research Scholar, Barkatullah Vishwavidhyalaya, Bhopal (M.P.), India

E-mail: jeevanrajak@yahoo.com

(Received on 02 March 2014 and accepted on 18 June 2014)

Abstract – This paper discussing about the issue of corruption in India, specifically look on the links between media and corruption. This study discuss about the freedom limitation and importance of media in democracy like fourth pillar. Major issue of this paper is discussing about the role of media to fight against corruption. This paper provides an overview over the basic principles of media effects and illustrates these with a few case studies before presenting specific techniques of involving the media in the fight against grand corruption and every-day corruption.

Keywords: Library Resource, Information Use Pattern, High Socio-Economic Background, Information Technology, Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is today a world-wide phenomenon. In our own country some people in high positions have been charged for it. Now-a-days corruption can be seen everywhere. It is like cancer in public life, which has not become so rampant and perpetuated overnight, but in course of time. A country where leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Lai Bahadur Shastri and Kamraj have taken birth and led a value-based is now facing the problem of corruption.

Corruption is the most virulent when crises everywhere threaten the very existence of the society and the faith in life is shaken. It has always been there like tie leech, but when the system grows weaker and the boat flounders, it gets bolder and drains its victims of the last drops of their blood. When we talk of corruption in public life, it covers corruption in politics, state governments, central governments, “business, industry and so on. Public dealing counters in most all government offices are the places where corruption most evident. If anybody does not pay for the work it is sure

work won't be done. A corrupt person is termed immoral, dishonest and unscrupulous in his dealings. His disregard for honesty, righteousness and truth results in his alienation from society. He is treated with contempt. But as erosion of values leads to decadence, remedies for the social malaise remain elusive, and so no amount of contempt can eradicate corruption which is a symptom of decadence.

The older the system the weaker it grows and fails to solve the riddles of life that grows more complex every day. So men lose faith in it and let it drift down. At this point corruption takes over and plunges the entire society. After Second World War the old system with all its values was left in a shambles. The crippling effects of the war, the recession and depression, and uncertainties in a faithless world of maimed and moribund encouraged cynicism in a section of the population. One would say the corruption in India has an ancient lineage; it is sanctified by tradition. The author of the Arthashastra made some remarks on government officials of his time which are relevant even today: “Just as it is impossible not to taste the honey or the poison that finds itself at the tip of the tongue, so it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up at least a bit of the king's revenue. These in the postwar world became only bolder while eating up government money and accepting bribes.

Today, when India is free, these officials representing all government departments are very close to the most corrupt businessmen who are too unscrupulous to let any opportunity of amassing profits slip. This collusion broadens the base of the vicious circle and corruption spreads 'like wild fire to engulf the entire society. The political and social guardians depend only too much on the richer communities and they look indulgently on while these communities hold the entire society and the government to ransom. Corruption starts at the top and percolates down to the whole society. Such corruption cannot be confined to the towns alone. It is

as widespread in the villages where the dishonest officials and the traders carry the germs of the disease. The tyranny of confusion and price rules the land and the people are helpless victims of corruption everywhere.

Though it is very difficult to control corruption but it is not impossible. It is not only the responsibility of the government but ours too. We can eliminate corruption if there will be joint effort. We must have some high principles to follow so that we may be models for the coming generation. Let us take a view to create an atmosphere free from corruption. That will be our highest achievement as human beings.

II. THE MEDIA AS A FOURTH PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY

There are three major pillar in every democratic society. Legislative, executive and judiciary. These pillars conduct, regulate and control the democratic nation. Other than above pillars media is a fourth pillar of democracy which is providing transparency and accountability for democratic society and help in regulation of all the government systems.

Legislative change and institutional oversight are important cornerstones in the fight against corruption. However, no law will change society if it does not become part of a country's culture, if it does not have an effect on people's everyday lives. Corruption is not a legal issue alone. Corruption is also an issue of society, of culture. In order to fight corruption, we need to change the culture that enables corruption, not only the laws that prohibit it. Corrupt practices are often embedded in institutional practices and everyday lives. They are perceived as fixed and uncontestable. Citizens are often not able to recognize corruption or to differentiate grand structural corruption—extensive unethical behavior by public officials—from petty everyday corruption—minor deviations from the rules for the benefit of an individual or a small group of people—or simple inefficiency and incompetence. The result is a culture with entrenched corrupt practices and very few people to stand up and speak against them. Citizens are not aware of their rights, are cynical about governments' propensity to abuse power, fear repercussions, or are simply not aware that corruption is a social, economic, and political problem.

Media are an important pillar of culture. Media are also an important political player. Media influence our

perceptions of what is right and what is wrong. They inform us about corruption and about solutions to this problem. They make politicians pay attention through wide-spread coverage. They also provide platforms for citizens to voice their opinions and demand accountability from those in power.

In the modern media environment, the effects of traditional media on our norms and culture have been enhanced by new communication technologies. Cell phones and the Internet have become an integral part of the media environment. In August 2011, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) registered almost 866 million subscribers to wireless phone services, making India the country with the second-largest cell phone user population after China and before the United States. By the end of June this year, about 100 million people used the Internet in India, which puts the country third in the World with regard to online users after China and the United States.

New information and communication technologies have become an integral part of today's media sphere. In many cases, traditional and new media reinforce each other and amplify each other's effects: Television takes up stories from the web and brings them to the attention of a larger audience. News stories from the traditional media are discussed online and create movements through online communities. Three examples from India and the Philippines help illustrating the media's power in the fight against corruption. The main part of the paper provides hands-on practical suggestions on how anti-corruption organizations can work with the media to gain public support for their work, and to work towards changing perceptions, norms, behavior—and culture.

III. FREEDOM OF MEDIA

In order to avoid some of the common complications inflicted on media, some governments have passed laws on access to information that give citizens and journalists the right to request and receive a wide range of information from the government, which make it possible for journalists to obtain the facts they need to do their job. This also protects the media as they can have evidence of the statements they are publishing.

The Constitution of India provides the right to freedom of speech and expression, under the articles 19 (1) . The constitution of India does not specifically mention the

freedom of press. Freedom of press is implied from the Article 19(1) of the Constitution. Thus the press is subject to the restrictions that are provided under the Article 19(2) of the Constitution. Before Independence, there was no constitutional or statutory provision to protect the freedom of press. "The freedom of the journalist is an ordinary part of the freedom of the subject and to whatever length, the subject in general may go, so also may the journalist, but apart from statute law his privilege is no other and no higher. The range of his assertions, his criticisms or his comments is as wide as, and no wider than that of any other subject". The Preamble of the Indian Constitution ensures to all its citizens the liberty of expression. Freedom of the press has been included as part of freedom of speech and expression under the Article 19 of the UDHR. The heart of the Article 19 says: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Like Indian Constitution so many other countries also declared freedom of media in our constitutional provisions. United Nations declared fundamental human rights in 1948. According to the article 19 of the universal declaration of human rights –

"The right to freedom of opinion and expression includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

- Freedom of information is a cornerstone of democracy, participation and good governance.
- When more information is available from the government it is less likely to be able to hide illegal acts. Excessive secrecy, on the other hand, breeds tyranny.
- Open public sector information enhances social welfare, as citizens become better able to make informed decisions about their daily life, and their futures.

But what is required for a successful legislative structure? Access to information represents the basic tools for development and good governance. It empowers citizens through access to and use of information and knowledge and engages citizens and citizen organizations in public policy debates, public services delivery, and the monitoring

and management of public goods. The obligations set out in access to information legislation apply to all bodies that carry out public functions, regardless of their form or designation. In particular, bodies, which provide public services under a public contract should be covered by the legislation. Finally, these laws are critical to making development policy and action responsive to the needs of the people and the poor.

Access to information increases public awareness of government policies, reforms, initiatives, and service delivery mechanisms. The media can produce and analyze information service deliveries thus providing citizens with the knowledge and evidence for holding authorities accountable, thus encouraging citizens to hold officials accountable for their actions and performance. Media can put pressure on government to reform the capacity of its public information systems, for example through locating public information centers close to citizens.

Information produced by public servants should be available to the public. Any formal exceptions preventing citizens from accessing public information should be well justified.

National governments should expand access to public information resources and reassess existing policies and practices for making information more available. All publicly funded organizations should provide open access to publications and public databases as a process of engaging citizens.

In order to protect the media, most countries establish Freedom of Information Laws (FOI) to officially legislate this basic professional and human right. In addition to the basic rights already mentioned and the desire to make government information more open, FOI also allows citizens to request that access be provided for information held by the government that is not otherwise made routinely available. The process for obtaining public information through FOI laws is not simple. Exceptions when this is not possible include national security restrictions, the protection of personal privacy, and the protection of trade secrets. Such laws typically involve a bureaucratic, cumbersome, and relatively expensive process that the citizen must undertake in order to obtain information that is legally in the public domain.

IV. ROLE OF MEDIA TO FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

The media may not be traditional tools in the fight against corruption. However, they are crucial in achieving the cultural change that must accompany any legislative change to make laws and institutional changes sustainable. Media can amplify the effect of anti-corruption legislation by a) reaching and mobilizing a broader audience, b) motivating political leaders to act, and c) facilitating a cultural change that will improve the sustainability of change.

Media are crucial in changing people's beliefs about the prevalence and legitimacy of corruption. The media's ability to change perceptions, norms, and behavior is at the core of their relevance for the fight against corruption. Every society is built on norms. Norms are standards of expected behavior and regulate the way we interact with each other. Research has shown that behavior is influenced mainly by our perception of norms: the norms that we accept for ourselves and the norms that we believe the people around us apply to their own behavior.⁴ Whether people accept corruption, go along with it, or stand up against it depends on whether we are aware that corruption is wrong and whether we believe that other people think that corruption is wrong, too. If we assume that most people do not mind paying a bribe to a local official or that most people think that there is nothing they can do against government corruption, then we will tend to just accept it ourselves and not do anything about it. If, on the other hand, we get the impression that many people are against corrupt practices and are willing to challenge them, then we are also more likely to do something about corruption. Media coverage is a major factor in shaping our perception about norms. For instance, local news on television, on the radio, and in newspapers can pay particular attention to instances of corruption and give voice to people who complain about it. That way they can create the impression that corruption occurs often and that people are upset about it. Social media can amplify this effect in particular through websites where citizens can report instances of corruption and through initiating a discussion about it. On the other hand, media can also propagate false perceptions about corruption, which can hinder the work of organizations that engage in the fight against corruption. A typical misrepresentation concerns the differences between grand corruption, petty everyday corruption, and unfortunate, but legal inefficiency. If media misrepresent inefficiency as grand corruption, they can mislead the public and set wrong priorities for the public and policy agendas.

There are three mechanisms through which the media influence our perceptions and norms: media act as watchdog, agenda setters, and public forum for a diverse set of voices. In their function as watchdog, media act as monitor of government behavior and guard the public interest by highlighting cases of misadministration, abuse of power, and corruption. By covering such cases they help ensuring accountability and transparency of governments and other powerful factions. The watchdog function of the media is perhaps the most obvious with regard to corruption, and we can draw on many examples where the media acted as catalyst for policy change by highlighting malfeasance. One of those examples comes from the Philippines and will be introduced later in this paper.

As agenda setters, media can put corruption on the public and the political agenda. Agenda setting is one of the media's most crucial democratic functions. By discussing issues and putting them on the public agenda they draw attention to problems in society. Corruption is often not publicly discussed, either because it is perceived as a social norm or because people are afraid of repercussions should they engage in public discussion about it. Media attention legitimizes corruption as a problem in the eyes of the audience: if the media think corruption is problematic, the public will pay more critical attention to it. Furthermore, politicians can be compelled by media pressure to reconsider existing legislation and policies. This is particularly efficient in democracies, where politicians need to be concerned about election outcomes.

Media also provide a public forum for citizens to voice their opinions on and experiences with corruption. This mechanism goes back to the idea of the public sphere, which posits that communication flows between state and citizens form a space where accountability and legitimacy are exchanged between both sides. In this ideal democratic public sphere, the media have a responsibility to reflect the plurality of viewpoints and political persuasions in society. This way they maximize the diversity of perspectives and arguments in the public sphere, which can then inform public debate, deliberation, and policy-making. By reflecting a range of perspectives the media can help introduce innovative solutions to the problem of corruption and provide a wide range of suggestions and arguments that citizens can use in their particular circumstances.

While agenda setting is a classic role of the mass media, ICT have been shown to be very effective as watchdogs and, even more so, as public forum. New media provide the infrastructure for a public forum in which different opinions and voices can come together. They enable deliberation, which is a corner stone of democracy, and which allows citizens to find acceptable solutions to public problems. In many countries, online platforms allow citizens to report instances of corruption by mail, phone, text message, and other channels. These reports are then compiled into regional reports by the platform host organization so that users can see what forms of corruption occurs in which region of the country. An example from India is *ipaidabribe.com*. The platform was launched in 2010 and aggregates citizen reports to show which departments and situations are most vulnerable to corruption. It hosts a “Top 5” of the most corrupt cities in India: At the moment, Bangalore beats Mumbai, New Delhi, Hyderabad, and Kolkata as cities with the most bribes paid.⁵ The platform also publishes reports of corruption, expert advice, and links to news stories about corruption. The later is an example how ICT and traditional media amplify each other’s effect by highlighting each other’s coverage of corruption.

Most notably, however, traditional media and new technologies amplify and reinforce each other’s effects. Traditional news media pick up stories that have been reported online, and vice versa. Through this synergy, coverage of corruption can reach more people and has a stronger mobilization effect. Social media in particular have been shown to provide opportunities for social movements to organize more efficiently and to spread wider and faster by significantly lowering transaction costs of participation.

V. ROLE OF MEDIA TO FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION : SOME EXAMPLES

Three examples will help illustrated the power of media to the fight against corruption.

The first comes from the Philippines, where in the late 1990s a group of investigative journalists uncovered corruption at the highest level of government. President Joseph Estrada was reported to conceal many of his assets, which allegedly came from illegal sources. Reporters revealed that Estrada did not disclose the houses and cars of his four mistresses in his asset disclosures or tax returns, but had purchased them through other people or companies.

Investigative journalists implied that those assets were not disclosed because they were paid for by money from illegal sources. These reports were crucial in mobilizing massive demonstrations against Estrada. Eventually, the Parliamentary opposition initiated an impeachment charge against the President. When it seemed that many senators were unwilling to act on the evidence against Estrada, hundreds of thousands Filipinos marched onto the center of Manila in the so called second “People Power” uprising (the first People Power Revolution was directed against President Ferdinand Marcos, who was forced out of office in 1986).

Two more recent examples come from India and demonstrate the amplification effect between traditional media and new communication technologies. The small independent media organization *Tehelka* began as a news website in 2000 and was able to uncover corruption in defense deals through an audacious journalistic investigation. Government backlash after this discovery almost crushed *Tehelka*, but it continues as a weekly newsmagazine unto the present day. The news organization was founded in 2000 during the dotcom boom and immediately launched its anti-corruption coverage by releasing stories about match-fixing in cricket. Information for those stories came from secret audiotapes. In 2001, *Tehelka* started an eight-month adventure with two journalists posing as agents of a fictitious UK arms company. In secret meetings, the undercover journalists enticed dozens of defense officials and political personalities to accept or demand bribes. Those meetings were recorded with a hidden camera. In the process, clues to malfeasance in 15 actual defense deals surfaced. When published, the story caused a sensation, seriously rocking the ruling party and causing the government to set up a commission of inquiry. The military initiated court martial proceedings against its personnel involved. Even though the journalistic methods uncovering this scandal were criticized, the story did unleash a staggering public upsurge of acclaim for *Tehelka*. While this watchdog maneuver certainly revealed serious problems in the administration, it also caused significant backlash against the news organization. The government targeted *Tehelka*’s main investor, forcing them into bankruptcy through a slew of tax and other investigations. The commission of inquiry set up by the government focused its investigation on *Tehelka* instead of those involved in the corrupt defense

deals. Tehelka's staff was forced into a time—and money-consuming legal process—more than 35,000 hours spent at the commission and a dozen lawyers hired—which led to the discharge of most of its staff and the suspension of its website. In time, they were able to raise sufficient funds to relaunch the tabloid as a weekly news magazine, but the financial future of the news organization remains unsteady. Tehelka continues its mission by covering corruption and abuse of office. At enormous cost to the news outlet, Tehelka certainly succeeded in putting corruption on the public agenda. It also enacted its watchdog function by using methods of investigative journalism to uncover corruption in the first place.

Anna Hazare is leading a popular public movement against corruption in India. Media coverage of his activities is a large part of his impact. Hazare has become a media personality, which gives him more leverage and political influence than any leader could have outside the media theater. Hazare's campaign taps into already existing public frustration with corruption. Since the audience is already perceptive to the issue, any media coverage of Hazare's work will fall on sympathetic ears. That, in turn, means that the media can actually make money by covering his campaign since they are able to attract an audience for this kind of coverage. Hazare's campaign uses multiple channels to get the message across, making use of traditional media as much as of social media. A team of former TV journalists manages his campaign, making sure that all buttons are pushed when it comes to media attention. By evoking the image of an Indian hero—Mahatma Gandhi—Hazare taps into beliefs and attitudes of the population that guarantee him widespread support. Hazare has also been using social media and new communication technologies to his advantage. His hunger strike was supported by millions of tweets, which brought his purpose to the attention of a very large international audience. When he was jailed right before his fast, he recorded a video message to his supporters on a cell phone, which was then posted on YouTube. Facebook pages, news gadgets for web browsers, and even cell phone applications and online games center on Hazare's activities, saturating the public sphere in India and elsewhere. As a result, the government must pay attention to Hazare and his demands. Hazare has created a huge public spectacle, and with it immense public pressure on lawmakers to heed the demands of the movement. The extent of Hazare's public

influence would not have been possible without his constant presence on all communication channels.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF MEDIA

Media has an important role to play in raising awareness on rights to official information and combating corruption. It does this by supporting and facilitating initiatives that sensitize government officials on the importance of making public information available, working with information centers to promote civic education on rights and entitlement under official legislations.

The media is important as it is a nonbiased source of information for politics and education. However the media is sometimes faced with limitations to their progress, such as ramifications for exposing state-run wrongdoings. In others, there are strict libel laws, which are meant to protect media stories from unsubstantiated claims, but are often so stifling that the media is again prohibited from fulfilling its defining function to share the news with the people.

In some nations, laws have been so severe that journalists can be punished with imprisonment and steep fines for reporting on government leaders. Charging the media with committing libel is accusing the media of publishing lies about a person, often a political official. As a result, the media organization and the journalist can be sued in court, and since the judges may be more aligned with the politician than the journalist they will often rule against the media. In more severe criminal libel, the journalist and his or her media outlet not only published lies but stories they told threatened the stability of the country. When journalists are convicted of criminal libel, they are sent to prison, sometimes for years, and sometimes the editors and owners are also prosecuted.

Some countries have used licensing as a way of controlling the media, meaning that a media outlet must obtain a license from the government before being allowed to operate. However, when media publish or broadcast news about corruption or other forms of wrongdoing by the powerful, their license may be revoked.

VII. CONCLUSION

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights,

distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish. Corruption is not inherent to any one society. Its reach is global. Many Governments, global business and international organizations have now stopped looking the other way. Corruption is one of the most damaging consequences of poor governance. It undermines investment and economic growth, decreases the resources available for human development goals, deepens the extent of poverty, subverts the judicial system, and undermines the legitimacy of the state. In fact, when corruption becomes entrenched, it can devastate the entire economic, political, and social fabric of a country.

Media are crucial players in changing culture toward more transparency and accountability. By changing perceptions of what is right and wrong, the media can affect the norms that society is built on. Changes in norms will, over time, initiate changes in behavior. This, in turn, can lead to less tolerance for corruption, stronger vigilance, and stronger participation in anti-corruption efforts. The media as watchdogs can create a broad coalition against corruption and be a catalyst for reform by uncovering grand corruption and forcing politicians into making changes. As agenda setters, media organizations can support anti-corruption movements by bringing them to the attention of a large audience. When the media act as public forum, they can introduce and spread opinions, solutions, and innovations.

In many countries, media coverage of corruption has led to considerable political and social change. In the Philippines, investigative reporting on the president's illegal assets led to his ousting. In India, reporters uncovered deeply entrenched corruption in the defense industry and motivated many other reporters to use similar methods. Currently, a movement against corruption is sweeping through the country, which could not possibly be as successful as it is if the media were not covering it extensively. In particular in that last example, we see how traditional media and social media function together to amplify the movement, to give it legitimacy and clout.

Organizations engaged in the fight against corruption can use media as allies and as vehicle for their work to improve their chances of success, their effectiveness, and their sustainability. To use the media, organizations need to

be aware of the way people use the media and of the way the media works. Understanding these two aspects will enable organizations to communicate with specific audiences to increase their awareness of corruption and to mobilize them to support efforts to fight it.

Success in working against corruption will depend on whether a lasting cultural change can be achieved. Even if regulation and oversight are in place to curb corrupt behavior and abuse of power, the real change will come through the people. If people stop paying or demanding bribes, if they consider corruption immoral, if they report corruption when they see it, and if they support the work of organizations fighting against corruption—then change will truly have arrived. The media are a major ally in achieving these goals. Media reach and media effects can amplify the efforts of any organization and contribute to their eventual success. Coalitions between civil society and the media are more likely to be effective in uncovering corruption in the short run, and creating a culture of transparency and accountability in the long run.

REFERENCES

- [1] Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 1948.
- [2] Constitution of India Article 19 (1).
- [3] Using Media to Fight Corruption ; by Anne – Katrin Arnold and Sumir Lal; A paper for the 2011 Asia Regional Peer-Learning and Knowledge Sharing Workshop “Engaging Citizens against Corruption in Asia: Approaches, Results and Lessons”
- [4] The Role of Media in Corruption Prevention; Learning Objectives - How does an unbiased media fight, expose, and educate against corruption?
- [5] Corruption; Cause, Consequences and Cure; U. Myint; *Asia Pacific Development journal* Vol. 7, No. 2, December 2000.
- [6] The Role of Media in Combating Corruption; Tobias Dahlstrom. Phd. Student, Economics, *Jönköping International Business School*, Sweden
- [7] Corruption in India; Wikipedia