

## **Unit 27**

# **Media and Urban Governance**

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### **Contents**

- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Media Governance Interface
- 27.3 Media in Contemporary Urban Governance
- 27.4 Nature of Mass Media
- 27.5 Roles and Responsibility of Media
- 27.6 Conclusion
- 27.7 Further Reading

### **Learning Objectives**

A careful study of this unit will enable you to

- describe the interface between media and governance
- explain the media in contemporary urban governance
- discuss the nature of mass media
- analyze the roles and responsibility of media, and
- the proactive concerns of media

### **27.1 Introduction**

This paper attempts to address the issue of urban governance and more specifically, the role of mass media in promoting good governance in the urban areas. It examines the interface between media and governance and the role it plays in contemporary urban governance.

In the recent years, urban areas, specially, the cities are enhancing their standard to compete in the global markets to attract investments to be a part of global economy (Friedman 1993). Although, on the one hand cities in India attempt to join any other global city of the world, on the other it does not address the growing inequality and polarization within social groups and classes in the city. One of the resultant changes in the transformation is the organization of labour process and a shift from manufacturing economy to service economy. While a detailed analysis of the impact of services on the income structure in the urban area is much in the offing, however, some of the studies undertaken in other parts of the world ( Sassen,Saskia,2000), show

that the service industries have a significant effect on the growth of unemployment, paying below poverty level wages and so on. This results in a tendency towards increased economic polarization that affect the use of land, organization of labour markets, housing, and consumption structure. What it refers to, is an economy which is undergoing transition whereby growth contributes to inequality among the existing groups in the city. Indeed, today there is a growing disparity, social inequality and poverty in the urban areas. It is equally alarming that inspite of growing poverty and inequality at the urban centers, the growth of urban population in India is less likely to recede. What is peculiar is the growth of the urban population at the cost of urban centers and decline of service provisions to attend the new migrants in the city. Although, urban India contributes to 70% of GDP, at the same time it faces enormous challenges. Most cities are lacking basic infrastructure, urban utility services and governance mechanism. The urban poor lack today adequate housing and social infrastructure, access to clean, regular supply of water, adequate sanitation facilities, comprehensive solid and liquid waste management systems, problems faced by slum settlements. Iniquitous distribution of resources and lack of access to basic services to socially and economically disadvantaged groups and finally, lack of information regarding citizen's needs and grievances.

Rarely, Mass Media helps in bringing to attention the plight of the poor to the larger society or to the governments of the day. Today Urban poor has landed up in a no entry zone where the privileges of past welfare policies are withdrawn and suddenly they are faced post welfare economy without any support to fall back upon. This is also a move from government to Governance where by other stakeholders are being asked to come to the rescue of the Urban poor. Today, the urban centers are becoming more diverse at the same time they are becoming more connected. Media reach once bounded by the city are more segmented by taste, identity, and ideology, and more geographically unbounded. Media serves as the connective tissue between the urban poor and the government, but changes in the media system have threatened the bonds between media, people, and governments. These changes include consolidated ownership, looser definition of public service obligations for broadcasters, and a variety of Internet-related changes in the way both the people and governments function. The new media prompt people to explore the potential for revitalization of governance structures. Amidst these social transformations, the media – new and old, big and small – are both part of the process and

interpreters of the process. But for a better urban governance, there is a need of developing a complex mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups can articulate their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations. Governance includes the state, but transcends it by taking in the private sector and civil society. The state creates a conducive political and legal environment. The private sector generates jobs and income opportunities and the civil society facilitates political and social interaction – mobilizing urban marginal groups to participate in economic, social and political activities. The present unit focuses on these issues and exemplifies the role of mass media in the process of urban governance.

## **27.2 Media-Governance Interface**

The relationship between mass media and society are inextricably interlinked. Mass media helps in empowering people as well as creating awareness regarding age old oppression, rights of the citizenry and the need for freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of expression and association are both the cause and effect of institution building for a better governance. These freedoms are crucial to human creativity and dignity. Social groups cannot organise or act to achieve any group interest unless they can communicate properly and overcome the difficulties of collective action. But Mass media may not be effective if the information is unevenly distributed in society. For instance, if media infrastructures are not uniformly distributed among class, caste, gender, religion and region than it would affect and constrain the ability of the media to penetrate and inform the people uniformly in society. As a result, it might weaken the notion of citizenship and make them ill informed about their rights. Thus, Mass Media have an important role to play in generating both trust and distrust of citizens upon governing institutions. Mass Media also plays an important role in creating civic education regarding human rights, election campaigns, voters education, election monitoring, observing code of conduct, exposing corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and business persons and educating the people. It can also expose nepotism, corruption at high offices, citizens' grievances and highlight the role of the government's opponents to erode public trust on governance. Sensational and negative reporting might increase the sale of news papers and increase readership in the short-run but it weakens their credibility in promoting social cohesiveness and cooperation in the long run. Partisan media have often encouraged a cynical corrosion of trust

of people in the governance process and induced a generalised distrust on political leaders, civil servants and other institutions of the state. They do not manufacture public opinion. They generate a 'crisis of trust' between the government and the people and disable the regulatory institutions in combating social fragmentation and violent conflicts.

There is a need to create a democratic public and influence the public institutions to be responsive to people. Sustained deliberation is essential to make those in power stick to responsible and legitimate action in their public life. The media often monitors political authority and style because it is on this basis that the multi actors of governance- the state, the market, the civil society and the international regime, conduct public affairs. Governance in essence is the process of steering, coordinating and communicating human efforts towards the attainment of certain goals (Deutsch, 1963:124) such as security, rule of law, identity and channels of participation and social welfare (Zurn, 1999:5-6). Media effectiveness is, therefore, essential to democratic governance, a form of governance that is concerned with making, applying and monitoring day to day progress. Governance also presupposes a partnership of institutions and processes, this partnership empowers the marginals to pool information, knowledge and capacities to develop shared policies and practices on issues of public concern. Mass media can play an important role in guiding and affecting the conduct of governance actors by shaping a sense of shared experience and political community. They are linked to the systems of society and situations under which a society operates. Without effective channels of communication among the members of a community, no system of governance can exist.

Mass media can help sustain human relationships- dialogue, engagement and compromise and reveal the mutuality of interests in governance matters. Media helps governance by structuring institutional relations of the society and by shaping the choices of people in public policy. Governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law (World Bank, 1994). The interface of media and governance can be captured by a number of variables such as the level of freedom of expression and organization, freedom from discrimination, freedom from want and fear, opportunity for consultation and involvement in public policy, transparency and accountability guarantees, etc. enforcing and monitoring the rules of the political game.

Mass Media can help citizens by raising their voice and participation in its institutions and encouraging to press their demands publicly within the framework of the law and the constitution. It can equally help in identifying public service ineffectiveness or abuses of executive power or malfeasance on the part of ministers or civil servants, and thus directly contribute towards a higher level of public accountability of the executive branch of government" (Watson, 1999: 4). Imperfections of information in the public sector create disparities between the "actions of those governing and those that they are supposed to serve" (Stiglitz, 1999: 6) and create incentives for secrecy. However, sometimes close relationship with power and the media fall prey to its designs rather than be a part in shaping those designs for public good. Hence, the worldview of most of the media is often biased, false and very ideologically filtered discouraging the growth of collective action among the different castes, classes, gender and regions.

If mass media policies are constantly shaped by the corporate and Industrial houses, then they generate what Karl Marx calls a "false consciousness", confusing people about their own interests and those of the magnates. To both Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim, ideology is the symbolical expression of economic interests, the fusion of class and politics (Bell, 1990:41). The instrumental reasons springing from the logic of commercial advertising leads people towards their de-politicisation where people as consumers are influenced more by techniques of the media and the consumer culture it fosters. In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite." transcend the ideological underpinnings of their position and reconcile the fragmentation of separate constituencies and belief systems and still inform the public adequately of what is good and what is bad in public and private lives? This requires courageous and successful intervention on the part of the public and the liberation of journalists from the shackles of the system.

Overt and covert influence of private economic and corporate power on the media, concealed from public accountability, does not help keep a constitutional democratic government amply just and clean. Traditional bureaucratic governance cannot keep pace with the fast changing modern society, which is moving with the speed of the digital revolution and e-commerce. New governance patterns require speedy decision-making, de-bureaucratisation, flexible

organisational formats and complex management capabilities. Effectiveness of media and communications is paramount to sustain these processes.

If journalists, like economists and lawyers, reflect the institutional biases of their employer, they weaken the power of the public. In the globalized context, sovereignty in the domain of government decision-making and action has been related to territorial and constitutional dimensions. Governance decision-making has become de-territorialized and complex, trespassing also the boundary of the Constitutional state. As internal power is fragmented, the government is compelled to pursue policies through negotiations on shared interests. This means that the government does not have monopoly over decision-making, conflict resolution, communication and collective action. However, It has to share the 'space' with the market, the civil society and the international regime. Each actor produces its own system of knowledge, institutions and communication, own theory of symbolization and symbolic representation and seeks its own ideal form of society asserting its own validity claims on the representation of truth.

### **Reflection and Action 27.1**

Read a news item related with any major issue which has been reported in the Newspapers of the day. Read and critically analyse the way the same news item has been reported in at least three Newspapers.

Do you perceive any bias or tilt towards any ideology in all of them or one of them? Write a report on "Newspaper Reporting and Ideological Bias" in about two pages. Discuss the topic with others in your family or students at your study center.

### **27.3 Media in Contemporary Urban Governance**

In the present Indian context, media plays an important role in the exertion of power and distribution of values. Media affects the overall quality of public life and also shapes people's engagement in the specific policy decisions in the Indian democracy. To make greater impact within the broad socio-political context, media needs to create a 'space' to effectively carry out its functions. In Urban India, communication and information flows are highly concentrated.

Today, Indian cities look like a 'wired society' or a 'network society' but this does not ensure a proportional representation among its inhabitants. It follows a logic of 'pay per society' where by receiving of media messages are measured by minutes and hours and affordability by its consumer. The face of Indian media has been fast changing with the growth of the Internet, the phenomenal rise of satellite and cable networks, the continuing growth of language press, despite various challenges and the blurring of lines between news and entertainment. There is a sort of 'crisis' in the present media due to processes of commercialization and commodification. Who so ever can afford to procure the media acquisitions can have access to media and the messages. Although these media provide the occasion to link vertically across the world, horizontally, they do not ensure communications among groups, communities and gender. However, it helps in reinstating existing power constellations and the extent of their influence. Such a system limits the proportional distribution of information, making it inaccessible to a large section of the society. In other words, the existing gaps between the information haves and have-nots are widened with new additions like the digital divide.

One may loosely distinguish three types of media in India governed by their own doctrinal system. One group, mainly officially owned and beneficiary of government patronage, is conformist which blindly endorses the policies and activities of the political circuit of the system constituted by the party-parliament- government axis. This group is directly related to the systems of power and authority and represents the interests and ideology of the incumbent political class. Due to over control of the government and risk-averse tendencies of journalists in objective reporting, reviewing and analysing of news and views, they are less concerned with the restructuring of life-worlds. The second group, that one can call reformist, is privately owned and shares the fundamental values of the democratic system but puts critical eyes and ears on the policies and activities of the government and, therefore, seeks moderate reviews and reforms in the style of governance. This group is a powerful defender of modernity and rationality for interpreting and reforming the conditions of public life in India. The third category is radical which advocates fundamental change in the basic rules and styles of governance. At the same time, the radical group is also concerned about developing new forms of knowledge. Each group has its own constituency, shapes its own motives and tries to attract people to its products. The preferred role for journalists would be not to form what Michael

Foucault calls an "ideological chorus line" but serve as "interlocutors in a discussion about how to govern" (Gordon, 1991:7). Nothing could be more apt in describing the Indian Media.

## **27.4 Nature of Mass Media**

Media in India are tightly compartmentalised into divergent interest groups, which displease one another in the process of "manufacturing consent," thereby intending to reduce the scope of human freedom and critical thinking. The main challenge before the Indian media is how to overcome the contradictions paralysing them and satisfactorily resolve a collective action situation? This is the reason why despite the age of information revolution the majority of Indian people are terribly ill-informed. The media are powerful means for state authorities, political parties and leaders to exhort the citizens to actively support their policies. These policies are derived from a set of political beliefs, strong ideas and certain doctrinal systems called ideologies. India has generally a free press, with its publications in circulation in every urban node where modern amenities are available. They reflect every political point of view and determine which events are newsworthy on a left-center-right horizontal ideological sphere, rather than on a vertical future-past dividing line.

Most of the media in India are privately owned but they do not operate independent of government rules and regulations on content, ownership and techno- infrastructure policies. It is only through media freedom that various viewpoints can be articulated in the realm of opinion formation and judgment. This is how people are informed and are enabled to participate in the democratic process. A sound democratic process achieves greater common good for the present and the next generation. As interest groups and political parties dominate the media in India, their political culture is accordingly fragmented. This fragmentation arises from the varied socialisation experiences of the various groups and sub-groups and which result into a one-sided and biased fixation on the primacy of their own interests. "The control over the media of communication by political parties and interest groups means that the audience for political communication is fragmented" (Almond, 1971:46) producing often disharmonious modes of political socialisation and fragmented action. Empowerment of the people produces media visibility while marginality produces their invisibility in policy attention.



As the media in India have become concentrated in the hands of a few powerful interest groups in key urban areas, their contributions in freeing the political society and providing equal opportunity to all is minimal. As a result, it has widened the knowledge divide between the core and the periphery and the rich and the poor even further. In no way do the media constitute a vibrant 'public sphere' in Urban India. The relationship between media and governance is fraught with tensions and meaningful possibilities. It cannot be denied that both media and governance in India suffer from serious problems, which at times even feed into each other. Suspension of civil liberties, excessive militarization, communal assertions, and homogenizing tendencies have too often spelled doom for Indian democracy. In this context it is imperative that media becomes more sensitive on issues of democratic governance, people's struggles against social injustice and inequality and so on. Its commitment towards democratic norms and values in its own governance system, structure and function is a must. Further, the role of people's organizations, social movements, voluntary organizations and other civil society formations in monitoring the functioning of media and making it more people centred is another critical issue. The role of civil society organization is important especially in the light of the fact that autonomous organizations within media like those of journalists and workers, have not only become weak but they also severely lack in their ability to raise critical issues pertaining to media governance and its functioning.

### **Reflection and Action 27.2**

What do you think about the role of Indian media in the context of governance? Write your opinion in about five pages and discuss the topic with your Academic Counsellor, learners at your study center or any friend of yours who is aware about the problem.

On the other hand, state control over television and radio, the role of multinationals and big corporate houses and bourgeois monopoly over print media has meant that media has often remained inaccessible to the vast majority of the urban poor and the marginalized. Overwhelming commercial interests and monopolies of a few affluent individuals and business houses are not good for democracy. The media, under monopoly conditions, does not provide a wide range of interpretive frameworks that are important for the well being of democracies. The carving up of media markets inter-nationally as well as nationally by mega, transnational

corporations has led to a catastrophic effect on the diversity of opinion, the nature of access and participation in the media spectrum and people's right to communicate. Real access to and participation in media appears to be for the few and not for the many. Simultaneously, the state has time and again tried to curb the voice of the media, to prosecute and harass those who have come out openly against repressive practices.

Over the years the corporate sector has developed its own press and channels. The political parties have their own newspapers. The voluntary organizations, groups engaged in movements, associations of the oppressed castes and the citizens engaged in promoting alternative politics have grown in terms of its sheer number and the area of operation. However they have not been able to develop their own press or television channels with a mass reach and sound credentials. It may be noted that different civil society formations have developed and are running their own medium of communications, like small magazines or newsletters. But these do not have an impact on a macro level and have not been able to develop a professional form. The challenge to develop a Community Radio and Community Television or at least a magazine is before all those who are engaged in various ways to promote and support alternative movements, alternative social groups and alternative models of development.

Therefore, a major challenge for Urban India is the enlargement of internal institutional structures of the media reflecting the broader society to be able to defend the interests of the politically weak population. A media community that does not acknowledge a larger responsibility to society is less likely to engage in self-correction, in terms of how it educates the public and what opportunities it offers to them for the future. But good Urban governance requires an effective media to promote participation and concern regarding public goods. Only those media pursuing the public interest can play their roles effectively. "The modern economics of information emphasises that once knowledge is made public, it becomes a public good that cannot be made private again" (Stiglitz,1999:4). Without a free flow of information, socialising interactions and collective action cannot be effective. Information flow has a positive correlation between communication and awareness of people about their political knowledge and between learning and involvement in problem solving.

## **27.5 Roles and Responsibilities of Media**

If we want to define various developments in the particular context of governance, and governance that means something for a majority of the poor, the struggling people, then we must first realize that the media, in all its varied forms, has opened up the potential for new forms of participation. People are discovering ways to think about themselves and to participate in governance that would have perhaps been unthinkable a generation before. Their access to information and accessibility of information has both increased.

Although different forms of media are growing rapidly, and people are interested to learn more about contemporary issues, the media is behaving like a market product. It attempts to satisfy people's thirst for 'news' but basically keeps in focus its profitability and market sentiments. It is clear that in the contemporary context the media cannot become a mission towards the goal of social transformation on a large scale. It is doubtful whether it can even become a leading agent in the process of establishing a people based governance. The media, particularly the newspapers, have managed to create conditions for a liberal democracy, a 'public sphere', where the public can widely share its ideas.

In order for the public to renew their stake in media, it is essential that media ownership and control be regulated so as to prevent existing media monopolies from increasing their stake in the media industry. The government should increase its commitment for Community Radio and television at district and local levels. Citizens' movements that are committed towards reforms in the media industry should be encouraged. It is a fact that the press, television channels and the entire media could be a business. But the journalists per se are not for trade or business. Journalism is a social responsibility. It is a struggle to gain public space within the private sphere. One common weakness of Indian journalists is that they report news and views on the basis of the "power hierarchy of persons" rather than rationality of their views. The priority of news accorded to powerful persons obscures the very purpose of the media to speak truth to power and give voice to the voiceless. Such a media culture erodes the very philosophy of public interest and common good. In the long run, such a trend rationalises the culture of power and victimises the powerless sections of the society.

What one sees now in India is that the government often chooses policies to serve partisan interests, not the general interest of the public. On the other hand, the globalisation process has de-coupled the national society from the nation state and continues to disconnect citizenship from nationality. As globalization processes demand national consistency in laws, institutions, processes and behavioural patterns with the rest of the world, many actors in the Indian sub-system have been independently articulating to their counterparts abroad. This incongruence of social and political space places the Indian media in a dilemma: Should they be driven by self-interest like the other actors or propel themselves towards public interest orientations? Many of them have even been deviating from norms and rules that are constitutive of governance. Obviously, in the Indian multi-party polity, the elite did alter the basic principles of politics but not the style of governance they inherited from the ancient regime. Yet, it is also the media that have brought participatory rights of the people into the public sphere. The decisions of political power have thus been bound and popular sovereignty linked to universal human rights. Achieving governance goals requires the development of three critical processes: "accountability, which denotes the effectiveness with which the governed can exercise influence over those that govern; legitimacy, which is concerned with the rights of the state to exercise power over its citizens, and the extent to which those powers are perceived to be rightly exercised; and transparency, which is founded on the existence of mechanisms for ensuring public access to decision making" (Robinson, 1996:347). These attributes are central in upholding the national integrity system of governance. One can also add one more process to it - equity- given the state of underdevelopment in the Urban area and in general in the Indian society and its media in particular. The communications policy of the Indian government aims to expand radio, television and internet services proportionately in order to make them comprehensive. At the same time, the government also seems cautious enough to make them competitive by enabling them to adjust with the obligations arising out of the nation's pending membership of the WTO and GATT treaty. For the goal to be met successfully, synergy from the complementarity of public-private partnership is necessary in both business as well as in the media.

As human beings are social beings, not atomised individuals, real freedom can exist only in a cooperative society in which a modicum of social justice is attained and people can form groups

for the aggregation, articulation and communication of their interest upon the governance structures. Indian media, in general, have a profound influence upon the educational response to social disadvantages of people and the problems of social inequality, marginalisation and discrimination. Media discourses and research on bonded labour, Dalit, child labour, women, etc have been exemplary in articulating perspective transformation and re-socialisation. This is helping gender and child socialisation towards freedom, equality and identity and nourishing the potential for change in the dominant cultural values, including the prevailing masculine dynamics, political structure and political culture. Indeed, the Indian media are also helping to transform people into public by means of provoking discussions even in public spaces and the private rooms. Indian media have exposed the criminal negligence of decision-makers. Newspapers report widespread hunger, injustice and corruption in day to day life. Journalists have been calling for interventions from the government, civil society and international community to reduce the amount of intolerable poverty, inequality, exclusion, ignorance and marginalisation. Indian media have thus been evoking an image of the watchdog of the society promising to liberate politics from pre-political and anti-political impulses. The attempt by civil society organizations to assert the importance of issues like, 'governance for the people' vis-à-vis media is an attempt to search for its own public space and its own means. There must exist a relevant political consciousness so that a democratic impact is possible. Media to be effective must form part of an ideological and political context – of attitude, feeling, hope and critical democratic values and practice. Urban poor, specially, the dalits, women and other marginalized sections of the society are also using the media to make their voices heard. Media in India depends on the central impulses and aspirations of democratic governance.

## **27.6 Proactive Concerns of Media**

In keeping with this understanding of democratic ideals, Indian mainstream media also place great emphasis on the creative role of new social movements espousing the values of peace, ecological preservation, democracy, human rights etc in democratic life. For the conception of politics to be adequate, it should involve the creation of a righteous space for the citizens to communicate and resolve issues of their concern. In this space, citizens can exercise their democratic rights and freedoms as well as include a variety of perspectives to deliberate on questions and seek answers. Politics is nothing but the processes involved in the execution of

these public duties. Politics is essentially public in the sense that the political sphere is shared equally by every member of the polity regardless of gender, wealth, class or caste position or political power. It is not essentially a manipulative vocation. And, to the extent that it appears to be so, it is only those selfish politicians who make it a dirty game. When their numbers rise, politics gets mired in crisis. In India, such a crisis has already led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the country and the suspension of fundamental rights and freedom of Indian citizens. It is a crisis whose roots lie in the malfunction of politics. If politics exclusively serves the private interest and exhibits apathy towards those who are not in politics but who do make up the public sphere, it cannot become a matter of public or collective concern or, by implication, political. In no way does such politics treasure a common ground for citizens and leaders of all hues. To use the public trust for private goals is just as serious a crime against the public as any seizure of public property for private gain. Anti-public politics, therefore, becomes anti-political. Democratic politics intends to widen the public sphere as it is deliberative, participatory, public, inclusive, and transparent. Anti-politics, by contrast, is essentially individualist, exclusive, private, non-public, and opaque. Anti-political trends become contagious if institutional mechanisms are not geared to correct them.

The public-private-donor deliberations have offered space for societal feedback, information sharing and coordination and have also enabled citizen groups to have wider access to knowledge and information. "Greater political activism means greater access, influence and control of the political system" (Patterson, 1999: 196) which broadens people's participation in public affairs. In an information- driven society, political power is increasingly defined in terms of the distribution of information. And, the media have become the central arena in the contest for power, resource and identity. The power of the media to control political thinking has been enormous. Transparency guarantees can play an instrumental role in "preventing corruption, financial irresponsibility and underhand dealings" (Sen, 2000:40). Technology can play a part here. In India, computerised networking of local private offices, government ministries and departments is gradually introducing transparency in their activities and operations and creating a bridge between the state and society. This process is expected to build a culture of trust. In other words, technology has a key role in governance. India has identified three areas of importance in formulating its information technology (IT) strategy- universal access to information and communication technology (ICT), education and training necessary for IT and

identification and adoption of IT applications. Public knowledge and access to information tools are essential not only to access government information but also to avail themselves of the social services and industry and business services. Those tools empower citizens to make important choices. Apart from the greater degree of transparency that government activities are infused with, these tools also induce media competitiveness to respond to the diverse challenges that emerge. One positive attribute of Indian polity is that it encourages open public debate on crucial matters affecting the life of citizens. Another positive aspect is the search for public rationale for every action of the government. This means information has become a core of the governing process.

The constitutional provision of the right to information (RTI) is expected to broaden the rights of citizens and access in the decision making of the government, provide meaningful control over the political processes and serve as an important tool of effective public oversight. But, the right to seek, receive and impart information is neither cost-free nor without responsibility. Nevertheless, the right to information and guaranteed rights are the two vital means of achieving democratic goals. A free and responsible press, an independent judiciary and proper government data information systems are perceived to be keys to good governance. It depends on the ability of journalists to a) access, gather, process, verify, and accurately furnish the information; and b) reach out to the diverse people, link them to an attentive public, policy community or decision makers. Information alone is of trivial value unless there are proper devices for using the knowledge obtained to influence government conduct in the executive sphere, especially in enhancing personal and national security, making and implementing of political decisions.

In the legislative sphere, giving people a voice means a higher level of political participation in the very centre of the policy making process. A greater level of media access is the first important step in facilitating public discussion on major policy shifts, representation and reflection of public preferences in policy making and articulating even the poor and marginalized citizen's interests in public policy matters. In the sphere of adjudication, the media can articulate equal access to entitlements, fundamental rights and social justice for the people as well as aim to establish a system of governmental accountability and due process of law. The

system of justice essentially constitutes collective goods. Indian planners and policy makers have also realised the intrinsic correlation between sovereignty of the people and media freedom and regularly organize programmes on stakeholder "consultation," "participation" and "ownership" on important public matters. India's government and its development partners have provided voice and participation to the media in legislative debates, preparation of Country Cooperation Frameworks and the India Development Forum. It is only "through voice- through informed discussion of the policies being pursued -that effective governance can be exercised" (Stiglitz, 1999:6). Greater information and transparency are vital instruments for informed public debate and for increasing popular trust and confidence in the institutions of governance. Governance today requires embeddedness of policy making in the consultative process, which involves the participation of all the stakeholders of society including the media. Media education supports the creation of an informed media public, a public that is able to critically judge between good and bad media content. Simultaneously however, for a true democracy, we also have to ensure that there is a strong stream of media free of any government control, with free speech and free press.

A free and responsible media is an important tool to make government accountable to its actions and make it responsive to the diverse needs of society. Freedom of communication is indeed a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition for its appropriate democratic performance (Meyer, 2000: 15). The public purpose of the media is to articulate the societal purpose to the institutions of governance. Though the government has a provision for spokespersons in each ministry and important departments in India and that it organises meet- the-press to facilitate the flow of information to the citizens, the exchanges between the government and media persons have not been satisfactory. The main problem appears to be a lack of experience with dealing with the media by the spokespersons. In fact, both sides are constrained by shortages of experts, resources and information base as well as a culture of listening and learning. Self-censorship or ethical codes of conduct of the media are an oft-advertised mode of self-regulation. But they are meaningless terminologies if they are not checked by other institutions of governance, such as an attentive public, effective judiciary and legislative means and even a responsive executive that does what it promises. Fair competition in the marketplace also helps ensure a free press. Indian press is free but not strong enough to facilitate inter-ethnic, inter-



regional and inter-religious communication aiming to contribute to the nation-building process. Media discourse in India is, therefore, weakly institutionalised and poorly sustained. Indian media often conduct on-the-spot interviews with the man on the street to help bring pressing societal problems to light. But such interviews are largely conducted in urban areas, mostly in the metros, where 60 per cent of all the publications are concentrated. By educating the public, the mass media can affect policy debates and policy choice thus connecting people to the institutions of governance. A broader spread of education and information and the growing pluralism of the society are certainly new pressures on public authorities to respond.

One should not also forget that newspapers are confined to small elites in urban areas and are quite unimportant in the overall process of communication since they do not reach a sizeable public in rural areas. This means that there could be a serious problem of urban biasness in governance institutions if corrective measures are not taken. This is the imperative to expand media reach to the farthest corners of the country. Indeed, decision-makers must be freed from a syndrome of listening only to the loudest voice.

There is also a reverse causality truth between the media and governance: Good governance also promotes media professionalism. Demand and supply of information go together. One cannot be included at the exclusion of the other. The media are powerful proxies of governance. What is still important is that new forms of information systems require new skills for journalists to be able to use the instruments to participate in innovation and market creation. Since governance is a purposive process striving to achieve societal goals, the media of communication serve as bridges linking the bottom with top social groups. It is hightime that the Indian journalists need to focus on the to better address the needs of the disenfranchised groups at the margins of India's society, economy and polity and help them project the truth independent of government influence and control. They should provide them greater representation in the mainstream. The solution to this problem lies in diversifying the ownership and control of media. It is equally important to make people aware of the main provisions of the Constitution, including their fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of information and making people active in public life, being players, not spectators. The help of the media themselves can be sought here.

Another aspect of a proper information flow is in the ownership structure of the media houses. When the government was the sole owner of the largest media houses, the criticisms were

simple to understand -that the government should not be the one to disseminate information about itself. But now the private sector is the more powerful counterpart in the news business. In the private sector also, it is the larger business houses that have been dominating the show. Known businessmen have owned the large publication houses, FM stations and even TV stations. This has led to criticisms regarding partisan reporting, which is alleged to be worse than the government media reporting as they have been protecting their business turfs through misinformation rather than seeking to fulfill the public's right to information.

There have even been cases where two large publications have been battling out in the pages with one writing exactly the opposite of what the other writes. This has nothing to do with trying to fulfill the public interest but rather about domestic private interest groups taking up the available tools (this time the media outlets) to lash out at each other. This shows that accountability of the newspapers is to the powers that be and the interests that own them rather than the people.

The ownership structure debate is a real one in India as it transcends other boundaries that South

Asian media houses have yet to cross. In spite of objections by the majority of media houses to foreign involvement in the sensitive information dissemination business, media control by foreigners is not a big problem in India. To make matters worse, a domestic TV channel is fighting it out with a government minister who has allegedly prevented it from satellite broadcasting its programmes. It is forced to uplink from another country. Although one may have bureaucratic reasons for these discrepancies, one cannot ignore the fact that the Indian public arena is being used to promote the private interests of not only the local interest groups but also foreign ones.

It is widely accepted that a free and investigative press is an important mechanism for ensuring the accountability of elected officials and bureaucracies to ordinary citizens. It is also well accepted that this mechanism is not working as well as it could be. Indian newspapers assign only 4% of their coverage to social reporting. The low priority accorded to social reporting is partly due to a perception among media professionals (publishers, editors, journalists, etc.) of a lack of public interest in news coverage of urban poverty and development issues. An important consequence of this is that major social issues facing hundreds of millions of people – such as

the lack of adequate basic services for the urban poor – receive almost no coverage in the mainstream South Asian media.

A number of other aspects of the relationships between local officials, the news media and citizens (particularly poor citizens) are not working well. A phenomenon closely related to the limited interest in social issues among journalists is the weakness of consumer culture among the urban poor. The urban poor tend not to see themselves as having the right or the capacity to exact a minimum standard of public service delivery from local officials. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the media to aggressively challenge and criticize the government as a matter of course. While independent, investigative journalism is an essential component of well-functioning democracies, an aggressively antagonistic relationship with the press can lead to a culture of withdrawal and secrecy among government officials. The result of this is a loss of confidence in government, inadequate understanding of complex social issues by citizens and journalists, and no improvement in the government's delivery of services.

The inclusion of the media would help civil-society organizations representing the urban poor to disrupt the 'vicious circle' of local government inattention to service delivery issues. The close presence of journalists, we reasoned, would encourage accountability in local government, transparency in decision-making, and ensure that the 'voice' of the urban poor was heard in service delivery issues which affect them. This, in turn, was expected to encourage the urban poor to have greater expectations and make greater demands of their local government.

## **27.7 Conclusion**

Modern societies are gauged by the level of media involvement in monitoring the exercise of political sovereignty and affecting the conduct of governance. The policy question is: Do media promote good governance? Yes, they do. The effectiveness of many functions of governance actors depends on the media. Independent journalists report, analyse and criticise social evils and denounce injustice and oppression wherever they occur. At the same time they create incentives by positive coverage of the social ideals. In India, the relationship between the mass media and the performance of governance actors has to yield more. Mass media forms the basic cells of public and private life in India. Owing to their key roles, media professionals in India are invoking the principles of integrity and accountability of the private and public sectors and seeking rationale of every action of the government. One can also notice parameter shifts in

media freedom in India with the level and intensity of the democratisation process. Media regulation, media professionalism and responsibility and the state of governance go hand in hand.

## **27.8 Further Reading**

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