

1st ANNUAL MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE

Theme: *In Partnership to promote Media Freedom and
Responsible Journalism in Rwanda*

Dialogue report

Venue: Umubano Laico Hotel, Kigali

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Introduction:

The Media High Council (MHC) and the Ministry of Information (MININFOR) organised the first annual media and government dialogue with the general object of jointly coming up with way of working together to promote media freedom and responsible journalism.

Close to 100 people from different key institutions within government, civil society, donors and the media (local and international) attended the one-day event.

Key Speakers

1. Dr Venuste Karambizi - Media High Council President,

Dr Karambizi argued that the day was not one for accusations and counter accusations, but instead a day for the media to amicably sit on the same table with Government and exchange ideas to foster the reconstruction of Rwandan media and seek solutions to the misunderstanding that occur between the two institutions

He further pointed out that despite the Rwandan media having a bleak history, the current situation is more positive and forward looking.

Karambizi seconded the idea of a having a dialogue and requested that it should be institutionalised and conducted annually to streamline the working relations between the two institutions.

Karambizi finally highlighted the major roles of the media high council which are;

- a. Promote media freedom
- b. Develop media freedom
- c. Insure professionalism

2. Louis Kamanzi - VP Rwanda Press House, MD flash fm,

Kamanzi pointed out that there are issues that need to be sorted out between the Government and the media and the dialogue is an opportunity to bring the issues to the table.

Media should not mince words when discussing issues such as intimidation, harassment, delays, denial of information, segregation and isolation.

He further argued that the Media should not remain tainted, if it is to work with the government in achieving good governance.

On the other hand, he urged government to come out openly with any cases of unprofessionalism for which the media must be accountable.

As a representative of the media at the dialogue, Kamazi urged his fellow practitioners to desist from speculative reporting which has contributed to tainting the media image.

On a lighter note, Kamazi said that there was no better way to celebrate Africa Media day (November 7) than having the dialogue.

3. Vincent Karega – Minister of Natural resources

As someone with special interest in media and debate, Minister Karega was part of the dialogue. He highlighted the media's role in enhancing transparency, accountability and in enabling citizens make more informed choices and decisions on matters that affect them.

On a larger scale, Karega pointed out that media portrays character of a country and has a key role in contributing to development.

However, Karega urged the practitioners to be responsible and highlight issues that would not necessarily be seen by the public. Their media should also be more analytical on policies.

While acknowledging the challenges the media faces such as poverty, lack of advertising and low purchasing power of the public, Karega noted the media is a business and the small enterprises should consider merging and specialisation as a strategy to deal with the challenges.

He finally warned the media against undermining government efforts just for the sake of it.

4. Patrice Mulama – Executive Secretary Media High Council

The State of the Media in Rwanda to date – Media Freedom, Professionalism and Media Development:

Mulama gave a detailed and exhaustive account of the history of the media right from the colonial period. He stressed that initially, the medias sprung up as political parties were formed. They were used as a tool to promote party propaganda.

Following the 1994 Genocide against Tutsis, the reconstruction of the media saw a surge of radio and ownership too diversified.

He revealed that 5 TV stations have acquired licenses but have not yet started. 32 percent of the 71 registered newspapers are regular and close to 38 have taken more than a year without publishing an issue.

He pointed out that the Rwandan media is characterised by poor quality of content, concentrates on politicking and has a limited level of specialisation. With Rwanda, government is the biggest advertiser, but there is also legislation that compel government to use public media for their adverts.

Professionalism

There are 3 Journalism schools in the country, however, they are poorly equipped.

There are over 400 journalists registered in the country, however, only 27 per cent have some Journalistic training

Unethical reporting (Defamation, bias, invasion of privacy, etc) has persisted despite a code of ethics that has been in place since 2005.

There are 8 journalism associations designed to promote the right of Journalists however, that are mostly passive.

Media Freedom

Guaranteed by the law, however a couple of provisions are not respected. For instance there have been cases of confiscation of recorders and notes, and the confidentiality of sources has been compromised.

The Access to Informational legislation is now in the pipeline

Challenges faced by the media

- √ Defamation, which is punishable by a 2 - year jail has contributed toward self censorship by the media.
- √ Foreign journalists access sources easily as compared to local journalists
- √ Detention, disrespect from the government officials
- √ Denial of info leads to reporting of rumours.
- √ Restrictions in the media law not clearly defined, making it difficult to implement
- √ Ignorance from government officials on how media can promote good governance.

Recommendations

- √ Decriminalisation of defamation
- √ Journalists consolidate and support their professional associations to ensure ethical media
- √ Expedite process of installation of printery
- √ Government to put in place Access to Information law
- √ Ministry of Education should prioritise journalism training in the country, increase funding to ill equipped schools.

5. Louise Mushikiwabo - Minister of Information/Government spokesperson

Minister Mushikiwabo clarified on the rationale for the dialogue, saying that it's a day for government and the media to sit and exchange, not because of crisis, but to step up the relationship between the two institutions.

She made it very clear that press freedom is guaranteed by the Constitution and Government and it's a critical asset for the country's development.

According to the minister, it is the duty of the government to protect and preserve media freedom. She said that there can not be a vibrant media with no good level of press freedom.

While reflecting on the Theme, the Minister emphasised the importance of ensuring responsible journalism. It's easy to identify, useful to citizens and critically constructive. She condemned irresponsible journalism and

The minister stressed that the relationship between the media and government should be of mutual respect, have a high sense of responsibility and be about professionalism and respect.

She acknowledged that Rwanda is lagging behind on media issues, however, the government is committed to a free press and is ready and willing to work with all stakeholders to improve on the state of the media.

On a sterner note, the Minister said the government can not be slaves to hate media and are determined to leave it behind.

One People, One Vision: Up-scaling Government-Media Relations to achieve Rwanda's vision 2020:

- Rwanda has one vision and as one people, we have to all work toward the one people one vision that the government is promoting. Media can not be outside the parameters. The media should not necessarily follow what the government says but where the government wants to go (Vision 2020)
- The vision is for all Rwandans and should be implemented by all. There is need to constantly remind how each one contributes to achieving this vision. The vision is a bond that holds us all together and media can not operate outside this vision.

Good governance

The media plays an integral part in good governance. It puts in place a mechanism for accountability and transparency. It should serve as a catalyst of positive change. It should

be noted that information is power and enables citizens to play a role in solving their issues.

Upscaling government communication.

MININFOR's role is redefined to fit dynamism and to have media as a tool for good governance. The principle is that communication should be made available to as many citizens as possible.

New media law should be read for its integrity, balance, even though it is not agreed upon by all parties as a whole, it is perceived to be a well balanced law

Highlights of information Policy on government

Government wished to open up to the world. Would like to take advantage of available channels particularly ICT's to provide access to strategic government information to as many citizens as possible.

People need to understand that information is for the public and they too need to provide feedback.

Mass Communication Channels

There is initiative to go beyond the quality of message and move towards the quality of channel of delivery. The government website is being revamped to provide public information or links to public information. It is important to take advantage of the facilities that the web offers to keep in touch with stakeholders.

Upscaling of gov't relations

- √ Establish more interesting bi weekly news conferences
- √ Media should Let the Ministry on Information know what information they require or who they would like to take to for the news conferences.
- √ National Information Agency – Orinfor needs revamping. Proper broadcasting infrastructure needs to be set up.
- √ Migration from analogue to digital broadcasting should be complete by May 2010.
- √ The Ministry acknowledges that government officials are not forthcoming with information, and attributes this to the lack of trust and confidence in the media.
- √ Intra-government discussions on upscaling communication mechanisms have taken place, and organisational structures should be set up in such a way that other people should have the authority to provide information and not only the bi bosses. Information should not be personalised.

6. **Marcel Kabanda**, Media Expert and **Louise Burnet**, Chief of Party Rwanda Media Strengthening Program and experienced Journalist

Public or Government media; which way should ORINFOR go?

Kabanda strongly defended the idea of having a public media service but should be independent of government. The state should guarantee financial independence of the institution.

Burnet, recommended the model of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) for which she has worked. CBC is a public corporation, owned by the state but not administered by the state.

Its content is basically Canadian and promotes Canadian image and culture.

The Government decides the budget, but it is managed internally and reports to Parliament once a year. It is not aligned to government and there is an Ombudsman who receives complaints and goes directly to the parliament.

CBC has a strict publicity code, restricts type of advertising particularly political advertising. Coverage of political parties is monitored to ensure fair treatment of the different parties.

Burnet pointed out that its hard to maintain independence if concentration of media ownership is in one hand

**7. Jean Francois Dupiquer - Media expert and Marcel Museminari - owner
Business Daily,**

Journalism in a Post Genocide Media Era: Can the Media Report Freely without Promoting Hate Speech? Should there Taboos/no go areas in a post genocide society?

Dupaquer recommended the efforts so far on media professionalism with view of equipping Journalists to address “negationism”. He said that it takes more than 15 yrs to build a Journalistic culture but its ethically important to build one.

Freedom of expression carries along various limitations such as security and there is no country that’s gives full guarantee.

He however noted that “Negationism” is rampant and its more complicated today than ever to control it because of the new media, internet and blogs.

He urged Rwanda to work hard and get to the level of the holocaust. No body says anything about holocaust and gets away with it and the same should be with Rwanda.

A mechanism should be established to look out for cases of “negationism” that may appear in the different media.

Museminal on his part said argued that journalists are easily manipulated because they are not well versed on subjects they are out covering.

A lot of state related issues are shunned because of fear of the reaction. He sighted cases of where publication of hate speech has been publically condemned.

Umurabyo paper published an article insinuation that those who killed Tutsi's during the genocide are punished while those who killed Hutu's are scot free. Umucyo paper also published an article comparing President Kagame to Hitler.

What can be published and what can not be published has to be made clear to the journalists.

8. **Ms Rosemary Mbabazi**, RDB Director General in charge of investment promotion

Investment promotion: Opportunities and Challenges of developing the media industry in Rwanda

Business Opportunities in the media

- √ Opening up both print and broadcast media
- √ Establishment of journalism school
- √ Content development as a business
- √ Merging of the already existing media houses that have remained small and not profitable

Challenges

- √ Minimal professionalism
- √ Private sector is small
- √ Media content has concentrate on politics.

RDB will provide infrastructure to help media enterprises establish out of the city.

9. **Mr. Jeneral Ulimwengu, veteran Journalist from the United Republic of Tanzania**

Transparency and Accountability: The relevance of FOI Legislations in the promotion of good governance

Ulimwengu pointed out that the Right to know is a fundamental human right and the Media plays a key role is to provide information. However, for the media to play this role, they should be able to interact with those who hold the information – Government since it's the greatest provider of information

Journalists should know how to get info from government particularly how government money is spent. (Procurement)

Ulimwengu stressed that with a freedom of information legislation in place; people will always report and ask the right questions.

Audience Intervention

- √ The Media High Council should have additional powers or else it risks being undermined.
- √ Despite Rwanda being ranked low on media freedom, we should not dwell on that but concentrate on the progress. The rankings have been proved to be inaccurate
- √ The media should get access to prisons
- √ There is need for more intensive journalistic training.
- √ Media is one of the sectors that have not developed as rapidly as the others
- √ The media law is available the MHC website and should be mastered by all stake holders.
- √ Decriminalising of defamation is a process which may take time considering Rwanda's social set up.
- √ There should be a distinction between Public Relations and Journalism
- √ People with different academic backgrounds should be encouraged to join journalism as long as they acquire basic training.
- √ Media houses should run as businesses
- √ Future dialogues should have a cross section of government

Dialogue Recommendations

After the day long dialogue, the following recommendations were drawn

1. Commitment to institutionalize dialogue and make it an annual event
2. The country's tainted media history has been the root cause of distrust between government and the media but that must change and should not be an excuse for not working together to promote media freedom
3. Media should take responsibility for unprofessionalism
4. Relationship between government and media should flow easily, be of mutual respect and must be professional, not about liking each other and seeking favours.

5. Citizens should have the ability and capacity to hold the media accountable for what they publish or broadcast
6. It's the Duty of the government to protect and preserve media freedom
7. Defamation should be decriminalized
8. Expedite the process of installation of the web Printer
9. Freedom of Information legislation should be put in place and also a mechanism of ensuring it's respected.
10. Media will have to be in line with the Government's initiative of one vision/one people in achieving vision 2020.
11. Information should be decentralized and not limited to the top officials within an institution. Build the capacity of Public Relations Officers who are the focal information point within government institutions.
12. Both government and Journalists should work towards making genocide denial being a no - go area as is the holocaust.
13. Media houses should consider merging to keep in business.

Conclusion

The Minister of Information gave the concluding remarks. She said that Parliament plays key role in media development and will have a more participatory role in the next dialogue. Political committees in both chambers of parliament are in favour of this dialogue.

Minister Mushilkiwabo gave a special thanks to the guest speakers and moderators.

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