

Journalists' Perception of the Free Flow of Information and
their Motivation to Access Information in Contemporary
Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Journalists' perception of the Free Flow of Information and their Motivation to access Information in Contemporary Ethiopia

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Freedom of information is the touchstone of all rights. Obviously, free press is one of the strong and relevant institutions that play major in the promotion of this important. It is very much inconceivable to assert free press without democracy. These curial instruments- democracy and free press- , which is highly regarded in the promotion of freedom of information, are recognized by the constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). However, the practice of free flow of information is not good enough to ensure citizens' right to know, participate in decision making process and make informed decisions. Most research findings indicated this is due to the undemocratic principles and practices of the government of Ethiopia. Suggestions had a tendency to lead to the conclusion that government regulates information contrary to the tenets of democratic values.

It appeared interesting to investigate whether government, media houses and/or journalists have role in determining the practice of freedom of information. In order to study, qualitative methods of data gathering technical was used throughout the course of the study with a minimal usage of quantitative approach. This research reported that government, media houses and journalists have contributed to the low level of freedom of information practice in Ethiopia. It was found also journalists' perception of the practicality of freedom of information contribute to their motivation to access information. To ensure free flow of information, political will of government coupled with strong and independent media houses was recommended.

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Abbreviation

ATI: - Access to Information

ERTA: - Ethiopia Radio and Television

EPRDF: - Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front

EBA: - Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority

FGD: - Focus Group Discussion

FDRE: - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

FOI: - Freedom to Information

ODAC: - Open Democracy Advice Center

Proclamation No. 590/2008:- Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information

Proclamation

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Freedom of expression is one of the most precious rights. It underpins every other freedom and provides a foundation for human dignity. Free, pluralistic and independent media is essential for its exercise. Media freedom entails the freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. This freedom is essential for healthy and vibrant society.

In recognition of this fundamental human right, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has recognized freedom of the press, expression and free flow of information. Ever since the ratification of this constitution, journalism and journalism practices have gone through various peaceful and turbulent times. In the last two decades, free press has suffered time and again as much as it looked flourishing under normal circumstance.

The universal notion seems to consider private media and its free, fair and independent practice as an indication of the prevalence of free press in a particular country. Though the private media institutions have failed to sustain in the industry and contribute to the development of democratic imperatives, several newspapers, magazines and other form of publications circulated in the country, particularly in major cities at least until the turbulent 2005 national election.

Therefore, has journalism in Ethiopia failed? I think, it is a serious and legitimate question but will not be dealt with in this thesis. However, 'lost' rather than 'failed' may be the most appropriate term to describe journalism in Ethiopia. Then who is to be

blamed? The situation has given rise to a number of discussions and debates as to why the paper and the practice are not synonymous and congruent.

Perhaps, all these deliberations may be summed up in two popular notions; emerging democracy and low professional level of journalists. Exponents of the first category endorse the debate that lack of the practices of democratic principles made information inaccessible which in turn hindered the free press contrary to the tenets of democracy.

According to this group, systematic and subtle coercive measure on fact collecting and reporting violets the constitutional democratic rights to access information and report the information. Under this notion, all conclusions and/or findings seem to conclude free press, free flow of information and access to information have never been witnessed in Ethiopia due to undemocratic and free-press phobic government; and inaccessible government system. Therefore, according to this group who questions the commitment of the government, journalists or media houses are discouraged to go for, access and report the information to the public. Information circulation are highly controlled and inspected before it is made public. Mairegu Bezabith (2000:25) states the situation “dissemination of public information in Ethiopia is a highly centralized phenomenon”. One way or the other, any attempt to access information of ‘high value’ for the prosperity of free press and democracy could be highly impracticable. Getahun Amogne (2005) found out that government officials are reluctant in allowing journalists access to information.

On the other extreme, there are a group of media professionals and scholars who tend to attribute the problem to low level of professionalism of journalists. Journalists and media houses lack of commitment to the profession undermines the free flow of information which in turn plays crucial role in restricting democratic practices. Supporters of this

move do hesitate to pileup all the culpabilities on government. They prefer to look at both sides of the ‘*razor*’ which they think could harm the safe practice of the free press more than it does by its either side. The experiences or practices of both government and journalists have contributed to the ineffective implementation of freedom of information (FOI).

This raises a critical and germane concern over the profession of journalism in Ethiopia. Mairegu (Ibd) describes journalism profession as “low quality professionalism” (Mairegu, Ibd). Quite a few numbers of practicing journalists in contemporary Ethiopia have attended a formal and proper education and training in journalism. It is obvious that this lack of basic skills in journalism contribute to the low level of professional in journalism. Consequently, that problem arguably plays a role in shaping the journalists’ perception of free flow of information. This research dealt with journalists’ perception of the current practice of freedom of information.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Freedom of and access to information is widely considered as a pillar of democracy. The guarantee of freedom of expression applies with particular force to the media. Indeed, the right to freedom of expression and people’s right to seek and receive information has no practical meaning unless the media plays its key role in a democratic society. Scholars note that the right to access to information plays a major role in economic and social development of the citizens (Potter: 2010 and ODAC: 2002).

Access to information ensures that the people have access to the information regarding the working of the government. It does not only promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration, but also facilitates active participation of people in the

democratic governance process. Government is the biggest and proper institution to realize this important right of the citizens. It has the power and means to put in place other proper institutions that promote the practice of freedom of information.

Strong and independent media are one of the instances that offer favorable environment for the free flow of information to flourish. It is the principal channel that ensures and promotes the right to access to information. This role of media will only be practiced and enhanced if and only if there are professional and committed journalists. Therefore, journalists' perception of freedom of and access to information determines the practical status of freedom of information.

Several media studies in Ethiopia dealt with a number of media topics including freedom of expression and access to public information (Mairegu: 2000, Getahun: 2005 and Kalyango: 2011). However, there is no study done with regard to the journalists' perception of the free flow of information and their motivation to access information. Yet, this area is presumable a matter of interest in determining the effective practice of free flow of information. The realization of information freedom could contribute to democratization process. Therefore, this research focused on finding out the journalists' perception of the free flow of information in Ethiopia and their motivation to access information.

1.3. Objective of the study

General Objective:

This research aimed to study how journalists' perception of the free flow of information affects their motivation to access information

Specific Objectives:

- To investigate the perception of journalists regarding the practice of the free flow of information in Ethiopia.
- To study factors which contribute to the promotion or limitation of freedom of information in Ethiopia.
- To examine the impact of free flow of information status on credibility and trustworthiness of media houses and democratization.
- To study the role of journalists, media houses and governments play in the promotion or restriction of free flow of information.

1.4. Research Questions

The research questions were:

- Does journalists' perception of free flow of information plays a role in the promotion of freedom of information?
- Why do journalists perceive the way do?
- What are the major factors that shaped this perception of journalists?
- Does their perception of the practice of freedom of information affect their motivation/ interest to access information?

1.5. Significance of the study

The research investigated journalists' perception of the free flow of information and their motivation to access information. It has the significance of finding out the current practice of freedom of information in contemporary Ethiopia. Secondary, it studied the factors that affect the promotion of free flow of information. The third significance is its investigation of how much journalists' perception of freedom of information affects their

motivation to access information. Lastly, the research forwarded recommendations which were supposed to be accounted with government, media houses and journalists. For further research in the future regarding this area, this research will be a valuable reference.

1.6. Limitation of the study

The specificity of the area of the study to Ethiopian journalists from Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency and Shegar FM 102 coupled with the lack of reference materials in the area, could be the main limitation. In my search for the thesis or any kind of article or study regarding Ethiopian journalists' motivation to access information, I only come up with barely satisfying reference material. Though I feel comfortable with the rarity of the prior study in the area, it was limited the opportunity to draw backgrounds to start with and reference to infer from in times of analysis of journalism tend in the country.

This study tried to investigate journalists' perception of free press, free flow of information and the framework in which information may be accessed in contemporary Ethiopia only. This is to say, the study was time bounded. Finance was the other important thing that limited the scope of the study. Without doubt the finance was not enough to deal with the subject at hand comprehensively even in strictly time bounded study like this. In addition to the finance constraint, lack of time and means to conduct the study in all media houses in the country was also one of the major limitation essentials.

1.7. Organization of the study

This thesis has five chapters. First chapter presents a general background of the study, statement of problem, research objectives, significance of the study, scope, research

questions and organizational of the study. Second chapter squarely focuses on freedom of and access to information, journalists' role, and freedom of information legal standards at international and national levels was presented. Chapter three and four deal with methodology of the study; and data presentation, discussion and analysis, respectively. The last chapter focused on conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Related Literature

Freedom of and access to information is the compulsory foundation for democracy. Presumably, the existence of one is directly related to the development of the other and likewise the extinction of the one results in the demise of democratic and human rights. Hosts of related literature argue that Freedom of Information (FOI) and Access to Information (ATI) are the source of economic and social development. Unfortunately, such a colossal matter is oversimplified or undermined in some countries or overstated in others. Striking balance is always a daunting task.

Freedom of information is not a free ride at all. There is legal framework in which FOI and ATI operates. Such legal background varies from a country to country. Yet it shares common ground which based on universal declaration of human right which international community adopted on right after the completion of World War II. The major difference is that developing nations recognized and adopted freedom of information long after the ratification of the universal declarations. Therefore, in this chapter we will look into these topics in detail by discussing other related concepts thoroughly.

2.1 Freedom of Information

The word ‘information’ is used in various forms, connotations; and thus defined in a multiple of ways denoting the affix word. Terms like ‘information age’, ‘information science’, ‘information Act’ and ‘freedom of information’ invoke basically different meaning and they entail entirely varied concepts. The Oxford English Dictionary for example identifies a Latin root, *Informare* (to inform, in the scholastic sense) and cites literary reference dating as early as Chaucer’s Melibee. The definitions include:

1. The action of informing; formation or molding of the mind or character, training, instruction, teaching; and communication of instructive knowledge.
2. The action of informing; communication of the knowledge or news of some fact or occurrence; and the action of telling or the fact of being told of something.
3. Knowledge communicated concerning some particular facts, subject or event; intelligence, news.
4. The action of informing against, charging or accusing.

Defining information, as per their content and form, is indeed a litigious as it is related to a myriad of topics or concepts. Journalists and sociologists alike warn against attempts of defining information by relating it to certain concept. Bruce Bimber recounts, “It is useful not to bind the definition of information too tightly to the human acts of perception and understanding by any particular political actors”. He argues that such broader concepts of information serves democracy in a number of ways.

Defined this broadly, information becomes vital to democracy in myriad ways: in the process by which citizen preferences are formed and aggregated, in the behaviors of citizens and elites, in formal procedures of representation, in acts of governmental decision making, in the administration of laws and regulations, and in the mechanisms of accountability that freshen democracy and sustain its legitimacy. None of these elements of the democracy process can operate apart from the exchange and flow of information among citizens and their associations and organizations, among citizens and government, and within government (Greber: 2006: 9)

Free flow of information is the flow or circulation of information among the public. Barry P. McDonald notes, “ ‘Free flow of information’ metaphor--- a ‘flow’ of anything- be it a river of water or information- is generally characterized by a source or origin of

the flow, the flow itself, and its destination (Ohio State Law Journal Volume 65 Number two: 2004)

‘Source or origin of the flow’, ‘the flow itself’ and ‘the destination of the flow’ is the three elements of free flow of information for McDonald. A genuine framework of ‘free flow of information’ should provide a comprehensive legal protection to the sources, the flow and destination of information.

The people’s right to know is a foundation of democracy. Throughout history, the cardinal element in the formation of democratic society-the element most feared and suppressed by totalitarian rules- has been an informed, active citizen. Therefore, it is believed that Press freedom, a power house of free flow of information, emanates from democracy.

It is tacit that free press cannot meet its target in countries where democracy is a far outcry. Scholars like Deborah Potter state that free press and democracy cannot survive without one another. She states her conviction as, “Free press is the oxygen of democracy because one cannot survive without the other (2010: 2). Johan Lidberg presupposes the same argument prior to his examination of ‘The International Freedom of Information Index’ by noting as “No freedom of information, no proper democracy (Nordicom Review 30: 2009:167).

These citations denote the universal standards that strongly define the contemporary political and economic system. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political commentator 200 years ago on his visit to America, was able to project this contemporary system as he puts: “You can’t have real newspapers without democracy, and you can’t have democracy without newspapers” (Potter: 2010: 2).

It seems he understood that press can exist in its timid and government mouthpiece form even in an undemocratic political and economic system. But he notes that real newspaper can only become a public forum where information moves freely without the interference of government if only if there is democracy. Tocqueville intended to write the importance of press that helps promote democracy in which freedom of information is realized. True his prophesy, the two institutions are both complimentary of each other for their promotion.

The relationship between free press and free flow of information is reciprocal. Free press is the steering wheel of free flow of information. A free press enhances the public's right to know by encouraging the free exchange (i.e. flow) of information.

It is of high importance to the public when government make recognizes free flow of information as essential value in the nation's political and economic enhancement. Based on the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Andrew Puddephatt in his article argues and indicates five resounding reasons as to why freedom of information is a fundamental human right (ODAC: 2002: xi-xii). These are:

First, without flow and access to information, there will be a high possibility to infringe the inherent ingredients of democracy. Puddephatt notes, "One cannot have meaningful debate, participation, or a public role in shaping of public unless you have full access to information." Kovach and Rosenstiel underscore the same notion stating, "millions of people empowered by a free flow of information become directly involved in creating a new government (i.e. democratic government) and new rules (i.e. democratic system) for the political, social and economic life of their country (2001: 16).

Secondly if there is limitations in the free flow of information, citizens are forced to turn to rumormongers and develop a culture of secrecy and conspiracy which could affect the general discourse of democracy. According to this scholar, “Once a culture of rumor and conspiracy infects a secretive society it is tremendously hard to shift. It inhibits the growth of progressive, open and constructive politics.”

Thirdly secretive system, directly or indirectly, contribute the expansion of corruption. In where there is no flow and access to information, there probability that corrupt politicians, businessmen and individuals go unpunished. The magnitude of such political and economic embezzlement on a comprehensive societal development is extremely immense and has a far reaching impact. Andrew Puddephatt states, “But if secrecy is the disease, then sunshine is the best disinfectant. Without that openness, tackling corruption is an impossible uphill struggle.”

Fourthly lack of freedom of information puts development of society on fringes. In one way or the other, health, technology and economic development depend on information. Puddephatt recognizes this notion as, “--- in order to achieve these fundamental basic development issues one needs to have a completely open and transparent regime of information- a regime where people have the right to both to access the information and discuss and argue that information amongst themselves.” So much so there are also those who believe the success the Millennium Development Goals hinges on the transparency that the free flow of information brings about (www.right2info-mdgs.org).

Lastly freedom to information is the one of the main mechanisms that holds governments accountable. This researcher confirms, “Holding governments to account is a crucial part of creating public trust in government. This is because trust is a two-way relationship. It

is not just about people trusting in government blindly, it is about the government trusting in people, by allowing the people to have the information that governments are obliged to provide.”

In his complimentary remarks on the advantages of flow of information, John Lidberg notes freedom of information important, “because it cuts to the core of the two central concepts in liberal democracy: political representation and political accountability” (2009: 168). For instance traditionally, election is the main instrument by which both the developed and emerging democracies try to be judged of their performance. However, Przeworski et al, as cited by John Lidberg, denounces election as the only accountability tool. These scholars endorse free flow of information as a chief accountability mechanism in the prevention of corruption and nepotism.

Freedom of Information has the potential to work as one such agency (alternative agency to election), not only in a country, but across the globe, ensuring a level of political transparency that could prevent corruption, nepotism and other forms of political malpractice --- the advantage of healthy freedom of information regime are not restricted to the public only. Transparent government, upheld by freedom of information, could be the beginning of restoring the public’s faith in politics and politicians, fulfilling the illusive third aim of freedom of information laws-greater political participation through independent access to un-spun government-held information (Ibd : 168).

Lidberg highlights the importance attached to the free flow of information in order to ensure transparency and accountability. In more eloquent presentation, Stuart Allan accounts news media as the crucial ‘fourth state’ due its role in maintaining the ‘checks and balances’ of liberal democracy. He notes:

The news media, according to the liberal pluralists, must carry out the crucial work of contributing to the systems of ‘checks’ and ‘balances’ popularly held to be representative of democratic structures and processes.

More specifically, by fostering a public engagement with the issues of the day, they are regarded as helping to underwrite a consensual (albeit informal) process of surveillance whereby the activities of the state and corporate sectors are made more responsive to the dictates of the public opinion (Stuart Allan:2004:47-48).

This paragraph underscores not only the significance of free flow of information but also the existence of media that are able to generate public opinion and ensure the free exchange of such public agenda (i.e. information). In other word, the very objective of free flow of information could be realized if there is only an effective media system, practitioners and owners. *“Democratic media do not, in and of themselves, create democracy. Democratic media need a democratic polity, and vice versa (John Street, 2001: 271).*

Freedom of information cannot serve democracy better if not supplemented by the right to access to information. Particularly, active free of flow of information endeavors with proper access to government information.

2.2 Access to Information

Access to information is the major underlying fundamental principles of free press. Public access to information is largely and practically related to all rights. The right of citizens to access information, according to the United Nation General Assembly, is “the touchstone for all freedoms (UN General Assembly, Resolution 59(1), 65th Plenary Meeting, December 14, 1946).”

Citizens access information in a number of ways. One among these, media assumes the forefront. It is widely regarded as a public forum at where information may be made

accessible. David Lush argues that media must have an access to public information in order to hit its target of watchdog.

The media must have access to publicly held information relevant to the public to be able to inform the people properly and to fulfill its watchdog functions by holding office bearers accountable. Equally, all people must have access to information to be able to form opinions and make informed political as well as economic decisions. Access to information is not only a basic political human right but also essential to socio-economic development (FES: 2011).

In same token, Jonathan Klaaren argues that there are four components to the right of access to information. These are a 'democracy- supplementing right, an 'individual-autonomy right, a 'market-supplementing right' and a 'socio-economic right'. Let us look at these components (ODAC: 2002:19-20).

Firstly democracy- supplementing Rights: - The right of access to information compliments democracy. Klaaren puts this , "Either in the form of democracy where access to information serves as a check on government power or in the form of participatory democracy where access to information allows citizens to partake in genuine public debate, the right finds its traditional backing in democratic rationales".

The second component is that access to information ensures 'individual autonomy. In his characterization of this notion, Klaaren notes the 'negative' version which shields access to information for the sake of the right to privacy and the 'positive' version which is an opportunity rather than an imposition on privacy. He states, "But with the respect to the positive sense, to the extent that an individual has a right to information in order to pursue, self-development and actualization, the access to information right has a dimension that comes into its own and is separate from privacy."

The third point is access to information provides fundamental and conducive circumstances for market. The advocates underline access to information drives market to the extent it regulates itself. “More information leads to more informed consumer choices. Transparency and the disclosure of information can be an effective and significant facilitator of economic efficiency” notes Klaaren.

The fourth concept underlying the right of access to information is the characterization as a socio-economic resource. The socio-economic dimension of the right of access to information is a right to access a mechanism to access information.

To this end American Library Association (2005), as cited by Getahun Amogne (2005), states that government has the responsibility to collect, maintain and disseminate information of public interest. The free flow of information between the government is significant in maintaining the transparency and accountability.

The public’s right to know about government operations and functions essential in holding government accountable to its citizenry. To facilitate accountability, it is the government’s responsibility to collect and maintain all information on its policies, programs, debates, deliberations and legislative, judicial, or executive activities, limit classification, regularly review for declassification and disseminate unclassified information to the public (Getahun:2005 15).

As mentioned earlier, media is at the center of free flow of and access to information. It is a limbo system even if freedom of information is there, unless media is active and independent. In other words, journalists have the responsibility to enhance media’s role as public form. This point leads us to what is the role of journalists?

2.3 Journalist's Role

Information which was once gained an auspicious name known as an 'expensive commodity' is renamed as a 'cheap commodity' in this digital age. The advancement of information and communication technology enabled everybody to impart and receive information. Journalists play unequivocal role in selecting, verifying and reporting information. Deborah Potter recounts:

Unlike a propagandist or a gossip, the journalist sorts through the information available and determines how much of it is valuable and reliable before passing it on to the public. Journalists not only collect the information they need to tell the story, they have to verify the information before they can use it. Journalists rely on first-hand observation whenever possible and consult multiple sources to make sure the information they receive is reliable (2010: 8-9).

Kovach and Rosenstiel further notes that the advent of internet, website, bloggers and social media, which cemented citizen journalists, has changed the traditional journalism landscape. They underscore if news traditional organization leave out information considering it rumor, a number of bloggers and websites publish it definitely. With this understanding, they recommend:

The new journalist is no longer deciding what the public should know. She is helping audiences make order out of it. This does not mean simply adding interpretation or analysis to news reporting. The first task of the new journalist/sense maker, rather, is to verify what information is reliable and then order it so people can grasp it efficiently (2001: 24)

Thus journalists should maintain professional integrity in pursue of truth and must try to stick to objectivity, transparence and fairness in their selection, collection and presentation of facts. In their presentation of reports, journalists make use of their

principal responsibility which is “applying judgment to information,” says Bill Keller, executive editor of the New York Times, as cited by Deborah Potter.

Journalists’ role is to adhere to the core journalistic principles which include objectivity, truth telling and news providers among others. Truth and objectivity are the universal values that are supposedly constitute the essential qualities of journalism.

2.3.1 Truth

Since time memorable, truth is the most confusing and contentious concept invoking various meanings. Despite its different definitions and form, it is the most sought after in the history of human being. This can be historical, philosophical, scientific and journalistic truth. It is not only their meaning of truth varies but also their way of pursuing truth is entirely different. For instance the truth that journalists and scientists seek is basically different. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel say journalistic truth is different from other form of truth as journalism demands truth in ‘the sense of day to m day’ life.

This is what journalism is after- a practical or functional form of truth. It is not truth in the absolute or philosophical sense. It is not the truth of a chemical equation. But journalism can- and must-pursue truth in a sense by which we can operate day to day (2001: 42).

However, truth, in its entire version whether it is philosophical, scientific, historical and journalistic truth, shares a common ingredient that truth is a continuous search, it never be final. It is process in which new facts found to supplement or disprove the previous news or information. Journalists, for example, who are highly pressed by dead line, time and space, may miss out salient features and facts of the truth on their first account.

It (i.e. truth) is actually more helpful, and more realistic, to understand journalistic truth as a process- or continuing journey toward understanding- which begins with the first-day stories and builds over

time; ... it attempts to get at the truth in a confused world by stripping information first of any attached misinformation, disinformation, or self-promoting information and then letting the community react, and the sorting-out process ensue. The search for truth becomes a conversation (Ibd: 43 and 45).

The authors emphasize the importance of verification in an attempt to report truth. This is the rule of verification. It is a process of sorting out, what Kovach and Rosenstiel call, 'the objective truth' from the irrelevant matters. Gaye Tuchman suggests four strategies of fact verification that journalists may employ in order to claim objectivity (Tumber; 1999: 299-306). These are:

Presentation of conflicting possibilities: Truth verification is a most likely possibility for journalists although some are still the subject of ambiguity. A journalist, for instance, reports that Eritrea supports terrorists and plays a destabilizing role in Horn of Africa by quoting Minister of Foreign Affairs. If the newsman reports the claim of the minister as 'truth', while the chairperson of opposition party disproves the claim of Minister calling it 'baseless allegation', his objectivity remains in tatters as audience associates the reporter with government. Under this condition, Tuchman states the report can claim an objective truth by presenting the conflicting possibilities. He notes, "... by presenting both truth-claims, the 'objective' reporter supposedly permits the news consumer to decide whether the senator (in our example, chairperson of Opposition Party) or the secretary (minister, in our case) is 'telling truth'".

Presentation of Supporting Evidence: Sometimes journalists become the predator of one fact, could be big or minor; and sufficed with it. Such tendency entails the danger of dependence on the one sided fact. Gaye Tuchman claims facts are substantiated and developed firmly through organization of supporting evidences. He states, "Supporting

evidence consists of locating and citing additional ‘facts’ which are commonly accepted as ‘truth’.

The judicious use of Quotation: According to this writer, journalists view quotations or sound bites or actualities of the other people’s opinions as a form of supporting evidence. By interjecting someone else’s opinion, they believe they are removing themselves from the participation in the story and let the fact speak for itself.

Structuring information in an appropriate sequence: Structuring the story enables the reporter in his effort of verification. In this story structure, very important or hard fact appears in the first followed by less important ones. The structure of a news story theoretically resembles an inverted pyramid. Tuchman understands the fact this approach is questionable regarding the objectivity that a newsman supposed to claim. For him, the only defense to this allegation is what he calls it “news judgment or professional acumen.”

News judgment is one of the main roles that the journalists employ in his/her news selection. It gives journalists an opportunity to use their professional expertise which is the result of both experience and caliber in the profession. Gaye Tuchman notes, “It would appear that news judgment is the sacred knowledge, the secret ability of the newsman which differentiates him from other people. The newsman’s experience with inter-organization relationships, his dealing with his own and other organizations enables him this news judgment as well as ‘objectivity’ (Tumber: 1999:304).

2.3.2 Objectivity

Before objectivity came to the professional realm of journalism, ‘pauper’ press in Britain and ‘penny’ press in America shaped the mid-nineteenth century press. With their obsession of securing a mass readership interested in reporting news/information that was neglected by the major press. Newspapers like *Twopenny Dispatch* in Britain and *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening Transcript* and *New York Herald* (*New York Tribune* in 1841 and *New York Times* in 1851) in America aggressively sought after news that had human interest (Allan: 2004:12-16).

However, as journalists called for professionalism, the term ‘objectivity’ came to scene. By the end of the nineteenth century, journalists recognized that knowledge of shorthand was crucial if the rudimentary standards of ‘objectivity’ were to be upheld as being representative of professionalism. Potter notes:

The concept of objectivity in journalism developed almost a century ago, as a reaction to the sensational, opinion-driven reporting that was common in most newspapers of the day. The term ‘objectivity’ was originally used to describe a journalistic approach or method: journalists would seek to present the news in an objective way, without reflecting any personal or corporate bias (2010:9)

The term (i.e. objectivity) began to appear as part of journalism early in the century, particularly in 1920s, out of growing recognition that journalists were full of bias, often unconsciously. Objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence—precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work (Kovach & Rosentiel: 2001: 72).

Ever since its inception, objectivity conjures up disputes among experts. It, with its all obscurity, aimed at reducing the journalist’s subjectivity, bias and personal values in the

news. Herbert J. Gans states that journalists acquire objectivity as long as they apply personal 'detachment' or exclusion.

Journalists justify their right to individual autonomy by the pursuit of objectivity and detachment; in a way, they strike an implied bargain, which allows them autonomy in choosing the news in exchange for leaving out their personal values. The outcome restricts the news to facts (or attributed opinions), which, journalists argue, are gathered objectively. This objectivity derives from the use of similar fact-gathering methods; like scientific method, journalistic method is validated by consensus. Equally important, the methods themselves are considered objective because journalists, being detached, do not care how the story comes out (2004:163).

In this excerpt, Gans tries to establish the relationship between scientific and journalistic methods in search of objectivity. Although Gaye Tuchman agrees with this notion, he emphasizes on duration that these disciplines before their own version of 'objectivity'.

Unlike social scientists, newsmen have a limited repertoire with which to define and defend their objectivity; ... social scientists may engage in reflexive epistemological examination; the newsmen cannot. He must make immediate decisions concerning validity, reliability, truth in order to meet the problems imposed by the nature of his task- processing news levels no time for reflexive epistemological examination. Nonetheless, newsmen need some working notion of objectivity to minimize the risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits and superior's reprimands (Tumber; 1999: 298).

Journalists cope with the pressures by emphasizing 'objectivity', arguing that dangers can be minimized if newsmen follow strategies of news work when they identify with 'objective stories'. They assume that if every reporter gathers and structures 'facts' in a detached, unbiased, impersonal manner, deadlines will be met and libel suits avoided.

2.3.3 Accuracy

The dividing line among the truth, objectivity and accuracy is as blurred as their definitions. Yet they remain the principal universal standards in journalism. As opposed to the truth and objectivity which have gone through various lifetimes that include the rise and demise; vice versa, accuracy has faced lesser critiques. According to Straubhaar and LaRose accuracy is related to telling/ reporting news without fabrication/manipulation, partiality and deception.

In convectional news media, prevailing journalistic ethical principles about the accuracy of information are quite strict. Journalists are not to fabricate evidence, make up quotes, create hypothetical individuals to focus stories around, or create or manipulate misleading photographs, any of which might deceive the public. - - - accuracy also means jeopardizing a scoop by checking facts and waiting to have at least two sources who can confirm a story before running it (2006: 473 & 474).

Most journalism codes emphasize that telling the news- being accurate- is essential. For instance, the British Editors' code of Practice lists accuracy as its first principle and states, "the press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorting information, including pictures (Media Hand Book: 2010: 45).

Accuracy like any other core professional ethics is not an easy standard to uphold. Of course, a journalist should make effort to verify a story before reporting. However, Media Hand Book states, "facts that alter the original facts may only be learned over time, after publication." Under such circumstances, verification and corrections of the prior accounts or news as immediately as possible saves accuracy of the media practitioner.

News organizations should take great care to assure that headlines, teasers, sound bites, or quotations are not only accurate but do not oversimplify the facts or take them out of context. Photographs, audio, and video may need to be cropped or edited to address considerations of space or time but

not in a way that misleads or misrepresents. The staging of photos or reenactments of news events should be avoided or where absolutely necessary, clearly labeled (Ibd: 46).

It is about being fair and balanced in reporting. Fairness is being positive in news collection, selection, rejection, and presentation. Balance is a notion to include the actors of the news. Although dead line plays an important role in the accuracy at hand, fairness and being balance keep the balance.

Recently as late as the last couple of decades of the last century, a number of media scholars questions fairness and balance as to the extent this two could keep the integrity and honesty of the profession. Kovach and Rosenstiel, in their book ‘The Elements of Journalism’, note:

Rather than high principles, they are really techniques-devices- to help guide journalists in the development and verification of their accounts. They should never be pursued for their own sake or invoked as journalism’s goal. Their value is in helping to get us closer to more thorough verification and a reliable version of events (2001: 77).

Deborah Potter seems to agree with these two scholars on balance as she notes ‘A story giving equal time or space to views of both groups would be misleading’ (2010: 10). But she disagrees with them on fairness. Though she admits that fairness is a daunting task, it is an important method to be upheld. She cites a reporter and blogger Dan Gillmor in her argument

Fairness means, among other things, listening to different viewpoints, and incorporating them into the journalism. It does not mean parroting lies or distortions to achieve that lazy equivalence that leads some journalists to get opposing quotes when facts overwhelming support one side (Ibd).

Fairness should be understood as being ‘fair to truth’ not to the sides. It should be about giving equal time and space to the sources. In their effort to set both situational and universal guidelines, Kovach and Resenstiel suggest important but not new terms namely Do Not Add, Do Not Deceive, Transparency, Originality and Humility. One way or the other the other four of these methods of news collection, selection and presentation are related to transparency.

2.3.4 Transparency

More generally transparency can be seen from the point view of journalist and audience. In other word it is the presupposed relationship between the journalist and audience. Journalist should be transparent about their skill which humility/ being humble and sources. Kovach and Resenstiel state:

Transparency is the most important single element in creating a better disciple of verification. Most of the limitations journalists face in trying to move from accuracy to truth are addressed, if not overcome, by being honest about the nature of our knowledge, why we trust it, and what effort we make to learn more (Ibd: 80).

They also believe that transparency signals ‘journalists respect for their audience’. Journalists should retain openness as to how the information is acquired, credibility of the sources and clarity of the information. Such process develops the credibility of journalism and asserts the most important role of journalists which is loyalty to citizens.

It is being said ‘journalists’ first loyalty is to citizens’. This is a professional commitment that transcends self-centeredness, safeguarding owners’ interest, serving ruling party and codes of ethics. Kovach and Rosenstiel note that being loyal to citizens earns journalists an uplifting morale.

2.4 Legal Framework of Freedom of Information: International and regional standards

Freedom of information works in legally binding legal framework. December 1948, Universal declaration of Human Rights Article 19 of the document states:-“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

This notion is adopted and respected in many developed and emerging democracies. For instance, highlighting the link between freedom of expression and information, article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) provides that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises (Open Democracy Advice Center: 2002: 5 &Media Law Handbook: 2010: 7).

African Charter on Human and People’s rights which was ratified in 1981 grants citizens the right to receive and give information “within law.” These rights are further defined in the African Commission’s on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) 2002 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa which states that: “public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of public good, and everyone has a right to access this information, subject only to clearly defined rules established by law (David Lush: 2011: 9). Article 9 of African Union Convention on Preventing and combating Corruption, a treated signed by 40 of 53 members of AU, says ; “ Each State shall adopt such legislation and other measures to give effect to the right of access to any information that is required to assist in the fight against corruption and related offenses (Jane Kirtley: 2010: 22).

All these articles from Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights and African Commission's on Human and Peoples' Rights appear to grant 'absolute' freedom to information. However, public, press and others are refrained from an unlawful attempt to seek, receive and impart information. For example, article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights qualifies article 19 as: "...determined by the law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedom of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic," (Media Law Handbook: 2010: 7).

Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights allows article 10 to fall in the purview of the following legal framework

The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of the health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary (Ibd: 8).

All international documents, though details differ, all recognize freedom of expression as a fundamental right, but one that can be limited by duly enacted laws tailored to protect equally compelling societal interest.

2.5 Laws that Discourage Free Flow of Information

Expectable and acceptable legal frameworks are thoroughly discussed in the above topics. As learnt from the aforementioned international, continental and national standards, these legal frameworks take different approaches as much as they share common principles. Reviews of a score of literatures showcase various working scope of

press freedom ranging from restrictive to impressive measures. These restrictive measures are those that discourage free flow of information. Censorship, lack of protection for sources and etc are those labeled as laws that discourage journalists from seeking, receiving and imparting information.

2.5.1 Censorship

Censorship is not a recent phenomenon in history of mass media. Governments, groups and/or individuals imposed censorship on mass media. It is defined as government-imposed restraint on freedom of speech and expression-poses the greatest single threat to free press (Media Law Handbook: 2010: 9). This handbook categorizes censorship as:

1. Mandatory pre-publication review
2. Extraordinary taxes or fees
3. Withdrawal of legal protection that would ordinarily be granted to other businesses or citizens

The above points can be categorized into forms of censorship. These are direct and indirect censorship. For instance, compulsory licensing schemes and mandatory pre-publication review seem to fall under direct censorship while imposing of gag orders during the pendency of legal proceeding, extraordinary taxes or fees, withdrawal of legal protection that would ordinarily be granted to other businesses or citizens are within the premises of indirect censorship.

2.5.1.1 Direct censorship

This is the form of censorship in which government conducts prior, during and post publication or production inspection. Usually government establishes a bureau of

ensorship that takes the responsibility of conducting this inspection or censorship. Journalists, writers, film makers are forced to make available their materials prior to the publication or production for the revision. Materials that deemed not important for their content of government criticisms such as revelation of government misconduct, exposure of human right violation and commentary on the rule of law are restrained from publication or production.

Dubbed as the passionate researcher of British media practice in mid-1980s by Vincent Campbell, Colin Sparks suggests six possible roles that state takes in relation to media: the patron, the censor, the actor, the masseur, the ideologue, and the conspirator. In his summarization of these roles, Campbell sums up ‘censor role’ as:

The censor role involves the restriction of information either in terms of availability or presentation. Again, there is no simple relationship between apparently democratic and free nations, and the occurrences of censorship, and systematic censorship too, no merely individual cases (save perhaps that authoritarian and dictatorial regimes practice censorship more routinely in all areas). A further complication can occur in that even if state institutions do not engage in overt acts of censorship, the mere potential of such acts can foster a climate of censorship in a country. Journalists may also find themselves engaging in acts of self-censorship in advance of state censorship, a risk that has been particularly evident and well documented in emerging democracies (Campbell:2004: 48).

The threat of post-publication, as opposed to pre-publication which may result in prohibition of the publication of the information deemed ‘unacceptable’, is the imposition of sanctions such as criminal fines or incarceration. The media law handbook notes this as “intimidating and crippling to the ability of a news organization to operate as any prior restraint” (Ibd.).

More subtle, but equally problematic, are mandates that impose certain duties or responsibilities on the press. Some countries require that the press publish “checked facts” or “the truth”. The same handbook underscores:

Government desire for accuracy reporting is understandable. In former dictatorships, where propaganda and the promulgation of falsehoods were common-place, public is eager to learn a variety of facts from many different sources. And it is tenet of ethical journalism that no reporter wants knowingly to disseminate an untruth; a corollary to the problem is created when the government declares what the truth is in the enactment of the insult laws that prohibit criticism of monarchs, politicians, or other public officials, national symbols, or a particular race or religion (ibid: 11).

In the contemporary global media landscape, direct censorship seems to recede into the back of the history books. No or very few countries uphold bureau of censorship as an important agency of government. Probably most countries have dissolved this bureau as democracy has swept the world in since late 20th century.

But it does not mean censorship is not practiced. It does in other form. This is called indirect censorship. Among many forms of indirect censorship, self-censorship is practiced in many countries, particularly in emerging democracies, as the most important mechanism to control the content of the media.

2.5.1.2. Self- censorship

This is the self-imposed censorship. Journalists censor themselves in fear negative repercussions. Kasoma notes that self-censorship occurs “when the selection of what to and what not to publish or broadcast is influenced by fear of punishment, even though there is no overt pressure by the authorities on the journalists” (2002:102).

In fact, there is no direct enforcement from government officials. Yet there is clear and present danger in publishing or producing government critical. Usually government

employs intimidation, fine, jail, job loss, denial of salary increment and lack of promotion. Thus Mwaura notes, “When journalists feel obliged not to publish information which might otherwise be deemed suitable for publication, or publish such information, because of fear of reprisals or to please certain quarters, they are engaging in self-censorship” (1994: 109).

Another mechanism to discourage journalists is the use of compulsory government licensing. This usually is justified as helping to ensure that only those with appropriate qualifications engage in the profession of journalism. But, Leonard Sussman of the New York-based Freedom House, as cited by Media Law Handbook, writes, “Governmental licensing of the press is the old blunderbuss of censoring weapons” (Ibd:11).

Government licensing both determines who may be a journalist and circumscribes the parameters of acceptable reporting and commentary. “In short,” says the handbook, “it encourage self-censorship and stifles dissent and debate.” Ever in countries where any individual has the right to engage in journalism, those who seek to operate broadcast, cable, internet, or even print news organizations may be subject to compulsory licensing.

2.5.2 Lack of protection from Compelled Disclosure of Information

The right of a journalist to protect confidential sources and unpublished information from disclosure is essential to promoting both the free flow of information and public’s right to know. Reporters must be able to assure their sources that their identities will remain secret in order to encourage them to speak freely. Under the title ‘A framework for a Free Press’, Media Law Handbook observes:

They (journalists) must be able to protect the fruits of their news gathering from scrutiny by government or private entities in order to maintain their editorial independency. Without these privileges, the ability of the press to scrutinize government and to uncover corruption would be severely compromised (2010. 18).

Furthermore, this handbook underlines keeping the confidentiality of the sources is both ‘a matter of honor and a pragmatic necessity’. A journalist who violets a promise of confidentiality will not be trusted by other sources in the future. For this reason, governments should provide legal protection framework for sources.

One example, taken from a Media Law Handbook, could explain the case better. In 1996 William Goodwin received a company’s confidential financial information from a source that he agreed to keep secret. The company claimed that the information was stolen and had obtained the court injunction to restrain the publication and order that compel Goodwill to reveal the source so that the company would take legal action to the source. When Goodwill saw the House of Lords upheld the order, he appealed to European Court of Human rights (ECtHR) referring his case to article 10 of European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) which states only exceptional circumstance could compel him to reveal his source while British government argued the no situation can justify the reporters privilege of keeping his source secret.

The court ruled in favor of Goodwill and as cited by Media Law Handbook, the verdict reads as follows:

Protection of journalistic sources is one of the basic conditions for the press freedom...Without such protection; sources may be deterred from assisting the press in informing the public on matters of public interest. As a result, the vital public watchdog role of the press may be undermined and the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information may be adversely affected. Having regard to the importance of the

protection of journalistic sources for the press freedom in a democratic society and the potentially chilling effect an order of source disclosure has on the exercise of the freedom, such a measure cannot be compatible with Article 10 of the Convention unless it is justified in the public interest (2010: 18).

The negative impact is imaginable if ECtHR upheld the order of House of Lords. Such legal guarantee boosts the morale and motivation of journalist to substantiate his report with a multiple point of views from a number of sources. Presentation of various sources is widely seen as a fair and balanced approach towards reporting 'truth'. Michael Schudson, as edited by Doris A. Graber, states that media should strive to be a public forum where its audience or reader set agenda rather than the politicians tend to manage the free flow of information.

If a media were to fulfill their democratic role, they would offer a wider variety of opinions and perspectives and would encourage citizens to choose among them in considering public policies. If the media allow politicians to set the public agenda, they may unduly narrow public discussion and so diminish democracy. This is the argument made, for instance, by W.Lance Bennet in his account of the "indexing" function of the press. For Bennet, the media "tend to index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic. Bennet argues that this helps perpetuate a "world in which governments are able to define their own public and where 'democracy' becomes whatever the governments ends up doing" (Graber:2006: 35).

Legal protection against compelled disclosure enhances the free flow of information. Public, journalists and sources make use of this legal protection to hold government, groups or individual accountable. In short, there is broad recognition that protecting journalists' confidentiality is essential to maintain their independence.

2.6 Freedom of Information Legal Framework in Ethiopia

Although it has been quite a long years since evaluation of mass media in Ethiopia, its legal framework is fairly a point of recent phenomenon. There is no clear and strong evidence as to why there is a lack of legal framework regarding media in both previous regimes. However, one thing is clear. Both regimes were never embraced democracy and built democratic institutions which are the guideline of freedom to information. Therefore, even since the advent of Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF, this notion began to enshrine in Ethiopian supreme law and subsequent proclamations of the country.

2.6.1 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Article 29 of the Constitution of Democratic Republic of Ethiopia grants the right to freedom of expression and information. Professor Andargachew Tirunehe, in his article ‘Investigative Journalism and The Ethiopian Law’, notes Article 29 as ‘the most important’. This article does bestow ‘everyone’ the right to seek, receive and impart information without interference. For the first time in history of Ethiopia censorship is prohibited officially.

After his examination of this article Professor Andargachew Tirunehe concludes:

In short, these provisions state or imply that the public has the right to receive ideas and information: journalists have the right to seek ideas and information and pass them to the public; in order to achieve this, they have the right of access to information of public interest; and that their right to seek information and express them cannot be limited by the content or effect of the point of view expressed. In other words, if journalists can seek or look for ideas and information, if they can access information of public interest, and if they can impart the ideas and information they acquired in this way despite their content, it is safe to conclude that the

Constitution entitles them to investigate and report scandals or misconduct of public interest (Nigussie: 2008: 139).

Although naturally implementation details are left for the subsidiary proclamations, regulations and rules, Article 29 shades light on the nature of information that may be curtailed under the law. Sub-article 6 of this article stipulates: “these rights can be limited only through laws which are guided by the principle that freedom of expression and information cannot be limited on the account of the content or effect of the point of view expressed. Legal limitations can be laid down in order to protect the well-being of the youth, and the honor and reputation of individuals. Any propaganda for war as well as the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity shall be prohibited by laws.”

2.6.2. 1992 Press Law and challenges

Press proclamation No. 34/ 1992 is one of the examples of subsidiary laws that supposed to stipulate implementation details. Article 8 sub-article 1 confirms the right of the press and its agents to seek obtain and report news and information from any government. Article 19 further stipulates that government officials should facility access to public information.

However, sub-article 3 of article 8 states types of information which may not fall under the premises of Article 8(1) of the proclamation. These are: “information designated as secret by the Council of Representatives or the Council of Ministers” and “information which is secret by virtue of other laws.” Andargachew says both Council of Representatives and Council of Ministers are not mandated by the Constitution to designate information as a secret. He also argues:

Moreover, the reference of Article 8 (1) of the Proclamation No. 34/19192 to ‘information which is secret by virtue of the other laws’ can have the possibility of the limitation of access to information by all government departments down to their lowest links. The phrase does not seem to refer to parliamentary acts as there is a separate provision for that under the same sub-article. In consequence, the phrase ‘other laws’ can only refer to government departments to the lowest level as these have the authority to issue regulations and circulars, and as regulations and circulars are characterized as subsidiary laws (Nigussie Teffera: 2008: 142-143).

Yusuf Kalyango, Jr. observes that government is using 1992 press law to limit free flow of information. He also notes that journalists are put in harsh condition for their attempt to expose misconduct of public officials.

Security organizations and state authorities’ frequency invoke the 1992 press law to prosecute or intimidate journalists who are critical of government misconduct. The 1992 law deals with libel, false and offensive information, and incitement of ethnic hatred. Dozens of journalists have been detained and arrested without trail for several weeks using the 1992 press law (2011: 97).

1992 press law was arguable the starting legal media framework in the country. Although it was not justifiable, government used this law to persecute journalists who is most critical of government as much as it does with those who infringe the professional code of conduct.

2.6.3 Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information proclamation and challenges

House of People’s Representatives, in an attempt to amend 1992 Press Law, has approved another media law known as Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation which is referred as No. 590/2008. The legislation, which had been under discussion for six years (i.e. 2002 to 2008), was passed with 291 votes in favor, 77 against and nine abstentions (addis-abeba.wantedinafrica.com/news).

In its preamble the proclamation claims that it is necessitated by the need of “preserving and consolidated past achievements and positive practices pertaining to the freedom of expression while removing structural and institutional impediments that hinder the independent operation of the mass media and the free exchange of information and ideas.” In the same section, it underlines the importance of this legal framework towards the consolidation and promotion of the “values of transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs...and to impose a legal obligation on public officials to facilitate access to individuals and the mass media to information so that matters of public interest may be disclosed and discussed publicly.”

Proclamation No.590/2008 bans censorship of private media and the detention of journalists. A statement from Ethiopian Parliament states, “Under the new law, previous restrictions against private media outlets, such as detention of journalists suspected of infringement of the law, has been scrapped”(www.ifex.org).

However, opponents, including media practitioners, claim the law is contradictory and ambiguous, with measures such as a ban on censorship of the private media and detention for journalists conflicting with more restrictive provisions. For example, Kalyango Jr. underscores:

Although the law bans censorship of private media and detention of journalists suspected of law infringement in certain circumstances, it allows prosecutors to impound publishing materials prior to publication; ... cases of libel and defamation saw increased fines and were prosecuted as criminal offenses with imprisonment under the penal code (2011: 98).

Days after the adoption of the proclamation, the Addis Ababa based Horn of Africa Press Institute (HAPI) issued a resolution noting a similar concern with Yusuf Kalyango Jr.

The institute states, “We have come to understand... that the proclamation is incompatible with the Ethiopian Constitution and other international human rights laws, conventions and agreements. It is a reversal and desecration of victories achieved by the repealed press (of 2004) (www.eastafricaforum.net)”.

The institute further notes that the new media law appropriated that the government has the right to prosecute defamation cases against the media even if the ostensibly defamed government officials do not initiate legal proceedings. The resolution also claims that the legislation imposes high fines.

In line with the conclusion of the review of Media Legal Frameworks in Ethiopia, it is wise to note the concluding remarks of Media Law Handbook. It notes, “It is probably fair to say that no country in the world regards the cherished universal or fundamental right of free expression as absolute. It is subject to limitation and modification when competing rights are deemed to outweigh it. As a result, some press freedom laws can weaken rather than strengthen the protections afforded a free press (2010: 9).

2.7 perception and motivation

Perception is the cognition which is produced through a sense-organ coming into relation with an object. Rao and Narayan (1998: 329-330), emphasize that perception ranks among the “important cognitive factors of human behavior” or psychological mechanism that enable people to understand their environment. In their own words, “perception is the process whereby people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulations into meaningful information about their work environment.” They argue that perception is the single most important determinant of human behavior, stating further that “there can be no behavior without perception.” Though focusing on managers in work settings, Rao

and Narayan draw attention to the fact that since there are no specific strategies for understanding the perception of others, everyone appears to be “left with his own inventiveness, innovative ability, sensitiveness and introspective skills to deal with perception.”

According to Nelson and Quick (1997), there are three major characteristics that influence our perception. These are Perceivers-specific, Target-Specific and Situation-specific. One of the perceivers-specific factors that influence perception is familiarity with the object of perception. Familiarity implies that, compared to others, we are better positioned to make observations leading to better relative ability to arrive at superior decisions about a particular situation. However, someone must note that for him/her to perceive someone accurately s/he must have generated accurate data on that person during the stage of observation. This is because the relationship between familiarity and accuracy is not always direct. “Sometimes when we know a person well, we tend to screen out information that is inconsistent with what we believe the person is like” (Nelson and Quick, *op cit*: 85), which constitutes a major danger in performance appraisals.

One of the most important target-specific characteristics is the physical appearance of the perceived. Some of these characteristics include height, weight, estimated age, race and gender. In addition, the way someone dress speaks volume about the way s/he is perceived. More importantly, perceivers find it easier to pick out those appearance traits that are unusual or new. Common examples of unusual personality traits include a very tall person, an energetic child as well as newcomers within a community. Verbal

communications out of which perceivers assess a target's voice tone, accent and related factors also affect his/her perception.

Situation-Specific Characteristics is a very significant factor that affects the impression that is formed about someone by an individual. In other words, the Social context of the interaction is a major influence. The strength of situational cues often provides clear indications of behavior that are acceptable within certain environmental contexts. Thus, there are particular situations that influence the behavior of an individual, which do not necessarily affect the disposition of that individual. This is what is referred to as the discounting principle in social perception.

Generally, the quality of input that a process attracts determines the quality of output that the process gives out. Correspondingly, "the perceptual inputs are first received, and then processed by the perceiver and the resultant output becomes the lease of the behavior."

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methodology

As mentioned in the previous chapter the aim of this research was to find out the perception of journalists about the practices of the free flow of information and their motivation to access information. Therefore, research methodology, data sources, sampling techniques and data analysis would be the focus of this chapter.

3.1. Research Methodology

Before the discussion of the research methodology, it has a paramount importance to summarize the focus of research. The area of the research was to examine the perception of journalists about the practice of free flow of information and their motivation to access information. The study would further investigate how perception and motivation of journalists play a role in profession of journalism.

Understandably, in order to study ‘freedom of information’, ‘perception’ and ‘motivation’, narrative ways of analysis was the major technique employed. Thus the researcher used qualitative research as a principal approach in the course of the study with minimal usage of quantitative methodology as a supplementary one. As would also be discussed under data gathering techniques, questionnaires, in depth-individual interview, personal observation and focus group discussions were the major methods used to study the impact of journalists’ perception about the free flow of information on their motivation to access information.

3.2. Data Sources

As already discussed, the research mostly relied on primary data. The data were collected from Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency and Shegar FM 102.1. The primary sources at these two media institutions were news reporters, editors (gatekeepers) and important

members of editorial committee. It was assumed these groups were at the abreast of the subject at hand and happen to be there to sense the cause-effect relation of perception and motivation. Secondary data (i.e. documents, thesis) were also use. These were inside Sheger- a document which highlights the core principles of Sheger FM 102.1- and previous theses that studied relevant subject.

3.3. Sampling Techniques

It is crucial to note that ERTA and Sheger 102.2 were selected to provide the research with:- (1) the information that might also be shared by other broadcasting media in the country; (2) data that reflect the experience and knowledge of the journalists in these media institution might provide an insight to the practice of freedom of information and (3) information that could indicate ideological difference between public or government media) (i.e. ERTA) and private media (i.e. Shegar FM 102.1) if there is any at all. The researcher, therefore, employed purposive technique. Samples were taken from the aforesaid media houses purposively.

3.4. Data Gathering Techniques

Individual in-depth interview, focus group discussion, questionnaires and personal observations were the main techniques of data gathering. These techniques or methods were used to address the different perspectives of the study with an expectation to draw as much information as possible that could make the research comprehensive and complete.

3.4.1. Questionnaires and personal observation

Questionnaires were distributed to 60 newsroom journalists from both media houses with an objective to collect significant information regarding the profile of professionals. The

questionnaires were prepared in order to elicit the journalist's perception, attitude, feeling, knowledge and experience. It also aimed to give the respondents a chance to freely respond to the questionnaires of their personal account.

The questionnaires included two types of inquiry questions. The first was crafted in a way to find out journalists' educational status and professional experience in newsroom. This was to set the demographic profile. Under the second type of questions, journalists were inquired to respond to questionnaires that supposed to probe into journalists' perception about free flow of information and their motivation to access it.

Moving to personal observation method, I believe I was in the position to observe of my presence in every methods of data gathering. It was critical to acquaint myself that personal observation should not be motivated and overridden by pre-perceived or pre-meditated personal convection. This observation was conducted with mere principle of neutrality and curiosity.

3.4.2. Individual in depth-interview

Editors and reporters of newsroom from both media houses; namely Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency and Sheger FM 102.1 were the subject of in-depth interview. Individual in-depth interview was supposed to provide the researcher with the interviewee's experience, feeling, perception and reflections. It also gave both the researcher and interviewee an opportunity to discuss the subject matter in detail.

More importantly, in-depth individual interview offered the researcher a chance to observe and make a meaning out of the body language and feelings. Finally, this

particular technique was predominantly preferred to other techniques for its comparative advantage in offering an opportunity for openness and flexibility.

3.4.3. Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion (FGD) comprised of reporters, editors and members of editorial committees. It provided an interactive discussion. It was an opportunity to draw an aggregate feeling, experience and reflection of participants which went beyond a viewpoint of an individual. FGD was a group of interactive individual who came together to discuss on the subject of the study as mediated/moderated by a researcher. As mentioned earlier, participants were selected based on their experience and knowledge from the newsrooms of the two media houses.

There were two focus group discussion groups. Each group was made up of four journalists- two each from the media institutions. At a time one editor and one report from ERTA discussed with two journalists of the same position/capacity from Sheger FM. This method enabled the researcher to gather information regarding the major challenges that undermined the free flow of information which invariably play a significant role in journalists' motivation to access information.

3.4.3 Data analysis

From data collected through in-depth individual interview, focus group discussion, questionnaires and personal observation, the researcher was able to find a fair and important description of the journalists' perception about free flow of information and their motivation to access it. During the course of data collecting period interviews and FGD were recorded, notes were taken, responses were compiled and observation remarks

were put together. All these materials were thoroughly presented, discussed and analyzed. Because of the qualitative data gathering method, mainly the narrative ways of data analysis was employed.

CHAPTER FOUR: Data presentation, Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This section deals with making a meaning out of the data collected regarding the journalists' perception of free flow of information and their motivation to access information. These data were collected from 25th of March to 1st of May 2012. Concomitant to the previous chapter, data were collected from Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency; and Sheger Radio FM 102.1.

The collection process was the most challenging part of this research paper. In addition to the difficulty in locating and arranging time with the supposedly appropriate or relevant individuals at both media houses, their lack of awareness about the significance of the study and unwillingness to collaborate were the most frustrating situation in the course of the data collection. Particularly, the reaction from Sheger Radio FM management team could be regarded as unacceptable behavior that may cast tint repressiveness on the media house.

The researcher feels it is of high value for organizations of such magnitude to help strengthen the struggling media industry. In line with this understanding and persistent visit to this media house, it was made possible to gather information regarding the subject at hand. Needless to mention, these data were collected through questionnaire, in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and personal observation.

Before the beginning of data presentation, discussion and analysis, the researcher was of the view that discussing the priority areas of both media could establish an important insight into the nature of information which each media could single out. In other word, it

is to identify the main interest area of the media, where it is expected to maximize its desire or practice to access information. Following this discussion, data presentation and analysis was discussed. Responses to the questionnaires inquiries were analyzed as followed with in-depth interview, FGD and personal observation.

4.2 Priority Areas of the Two Media Houses

Media's role as the 'fourth estate' of government is now deemed a common understanding or universal truth. This role is seemingly drawn out of the concept that it (i.e. media) supplements the role of legislatives, executives and judiciaries organs. Just like the three government organs, media set objective areas or interests that need to be prioritized in its professional reporting. The concept of prioritization has also something to do with the dominant political and economic ideology of the country. Thirdly, professional prioritization is put in place considering the interest of the target audience. This notion stems from the popular journalistic principle that states 'journalist/media house is loyal to public/citizens' (Kovach & Rosenstiel: 2001). Lastly, resource of the organization, particularly in developing economies such as Ethiopia, forces the media to have an area of specialization/ priority.

With brief introduction to the underpinning conceptual introduction, it is important to note why this topic needed to be included and discussed in this particular research. Its relevance to the research topic and importance or role in the presentation and discussion of the data are the main point that triggers the interest of the majority. Similarly, how to identify these areas of priority should be the other significant question to be explained. These matters, obviously, drawn from editorial policies, interview with respective media managers and personal observation.

Identifying the priority areas has a number of advantages in the discussion and analysis of data. It helps get the researcher and reader/s what kind of information, a particular media (i.e. out of the target media houses) is likely to regard ‘important’. When media consider the information important, based on priority areas, it is believed that most probably, that particular media may develop an interest to collect, verify and report the information. This is to assert that media tend to access information deemed important to target audience and in line with its editorial policies. Secondly, it provided the researcher with a more specific approach and thereby investigated journalists’ perception of free flow of information and motivation to access information in their respective media houses. Furthermore, identifying the priority areas would offer an opportunity to the researcher as to study the research topic against their set priority areas.

4.2.1 Priority Areas of Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency

Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA) is the largest and oldest media in the country. In its entire history, the agency has gone through various areas of priorities ranging from serving the royal family to reporting development. However, it is not in the interest of neither the researcher nor research’s objective to study the historical areas of priority of the agency. Yet, identifying and discussing the present main priority areas of ERTA plays the fundamental role in understanding its journalists’ perception of free flow of information and their motivation to access the information that they consider worthy.

At the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, with the advent of Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to Power in 1991, Ethiopian media landscape changed. A year later, 1992, new press law was promulgated guaranteeing freedom to and access to information of public interest. Sixteen years later, in 2008, the

House of Peoples Representatives passed a proclamation known as Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008.

Both press law pay a great deal of attention to the fact that media is at the centre of democratization process and development agenda. Apparently, ERTA seems to put its editorial policy together with the recognition of the political and economic ideology that underpins both press laws. It, therefore, is fair to state development and democracy are the salient priority areas of ERTA.

Promoting the Ethiopian Renaissance, the current motto of the agency, signifies the preference of ERTA. Its management members confidently reckon their media house is adamant that developmental news is what the country and citizens need at this moment in time. In an interview, Teshale Bekele, Deputy General Director and Head of Educational and Social Affairs Work Process, states:

The main objective of ERTA, as indicated in the editorial policy, is to supplement or support the comprehensive development and democratization process of our country. It is supporting development endeavors of the government, citizens and businessmen/ women. It is also to expand, strengthen and speedup developmental efforts of all classes of society and government. Finally, it is about giving information, scaling up good practices and informing the public.

Development is the most repeatedly mentioned word in the above quotation. Similarly Ashebir Getnet, director of News and Currents Affairs Work Process, signs off this by underscoring, “our media is the practitioner or follower of developmental journalism. - - - news is selected based on the role it has in the national effort to alleviate poverty. ”

The other crucial word that Teshale mentioned in the above quote is democratization process. Democratization is a process in which values, principles and essences of

democracy are practically promoted and respected by government and citizens alike. As media are usually referred to as the ‘watchdog’, it presumably plays a major role in maintaining open, responsible and accountable government as much as it does create informed and vibrant citizens.

In an attempt to underscore the second main priority areas of ERTA, Teshale highlights the actual practice of the editorial notion by stating:

We have limited air time. Out of such tight time budget, both *Fitlefit* and *Ayinachin*, weekly investigative Amharic TV Programs, are given 45 minute each. *ERTA Medrek*, a weekly Amharic phone-in Radio program, is on air for two hours and thirty minutes. No other, both on TV and Radio, has duration of more than 25 minutes. This shows our commitment to good governance.

Ashebir tends to emphasize on this priority area when he says, “addition to what I have mentioned earlier, our main priority is development, democracy and peace.” He added peace to the categories. However, peace can also be considered as one of the important aspects of democracy. Both Teshale and Ashebir agree on reporting problems related to development and democracy but claim such news must be ‘balanced by including all the stakeholders and by practicing fair in reporting or presenting the view points of the stakeholders.

It is very important to note that the researcher is not suggesting any other reporting approach and/or criticizing the existing objective of ERTA. Equally significant is also to bear in mind that the researcher is not going to study ERTA’s application of developmental journalism or communication. The mere purpose under this topic is to set a clear and strong foundation upon which journalists’ perception about free flow of information and their motivation to access that information supposed worthy by

themselves and their media organization. In other word, it is to avoid the ambiguous or dubious responses which are likely to be in the respondents' final reply lest they are required to examine their exact perception and motivation to access information of theirs and organizational interest

4.2.2 Priority Areas of Sheger FM 102.1

Sheger FM 102.1 is one of a few private broadcasting media that was licensed and registered with the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) in Addis Ababa. According to Ethiopia Media Mapping 2011 by Electoral Reform International Service (ERIS), this FM radio was established in 2006 and owned by Adey Tinsae Media and Entertainment PLC. It is a 40 KM radius coverage radio station with a target audience of 3 million in Addis Ababa and its surrounding. Demographically, the target audience is quite diverse ranging from teens to adults.

The other important fact that should be discussed before identifying the priority areas is its nature of the business mode. Unlike the Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency which is financed by government, Sheger FM 102.1 generates most of its income through advertisements and renting or selling airtime. A fair share of its revenue is also from private sponsor/s which could be the owners or supporters. Its motto '*Yenatew Radio*' (yours radio) and slogan '*Ethiopia Lezelalem Tinur!*' (Long live Ethiopia) are partly intended, as the same interviewee states, "to attract advertisers and encourage them to participate."

Contrary to the public financed media, such profit oriented media outlets have a keen interest in market. In order to maximize their benefit and survive in the ever demanding industry, Sheger FM 102.1 strives to attract the maximum possible audience by its reach

(Kejela: 2010). In other word, it gives due priority to making profit through making best use of every single program to attract advertisers, audiences and airtime seekers. Therefore, entertainment programs such as music, dramas, talk shows, sport and, etc, are meant to serve this goal as much as they meant to amuse the audiences. This discussion leads to the identification of one important area of priority, which is entertainment. Indeed, one could still argue the nature of the radio station, FM, is primary meant to entertain.

According to the Interviews with the editor and a ‘guideline’ document known as ‘*inside Sheger*’ the priority area of Sheger FM 102.1 is reporting or presenting what audiences want to know. In other word, this is a claim that the radio pays due attention to public opinion. This case witness agenda setting is being set by the audience. In a further extended discussion, a member of management team expressed this is the main reason behind the radio’s interest in feedback. This notion is noticeable in radio’s presentation style and emotive slogans ‘*Ethiopia Lezalam Tinur*’. It is an emotional appeal, propelled to entice the audience listen to and feedback.

But one thing that the research would not intend to, which is also not the objective of this study is whether all feedback of the audience can be considered and reported. Equally important to bear in mind that this does not mean Sheger FM 102.1 does not have its own program and news package. These interviewees are trying to state that that feedback is focused to gauge or understand the general public’s interest. A senior reporter, interviewed for the purpose of this study, said:

Sheger FM values feedback. Those feedbacks have the capacity to set our priority that could show us what kind of information our audience needs to hear. They want Sheger to report a range of issues which sometimes,

unfortunately, we cannot be delivered/dealt with for quite certain reasons (the interviewee was unwilling to qualify the reason claiming it is a sensitive matter that he is not authorized to comment on). But, feedbacks are very important in Sheger FM's setting priorities areas of the radio; particularly, those feedback regarding entertainment and social issues are adherently collected, organized and taken into account for the production of news/programs to the best level of the radio.

This interviewee underlines that feedback based regarding the news or programs are the important priority area of the radio station. The senior reporter suggests that not all feedback are highly regarded for the production of news or program when he states, "those feedback regarding entertainment and social issues are stoutly collected, organized and taken into account for the production of news/programs."

In a more analytical approach, Sheger FM 102.1 tends to draw its media philosophy/ideology from libertarian press/media theory. This is a theory that claims that society is free and able to select or reject media's report or presentation. Market, according to this theory, is the driving force that any media should react accordingly and amicably. "In a free market system, winning and sustaining a competition through service competence that necessitates a growing audience share. And, in order to increase audience share, satisfying the listeners' interest and increasing credibility is paramount. Therefore, the station needs to create such a capacity and strengthen it (McQuail: 1997). Although it is difficult to categorize Sheger FM 102.1 into this media theory, it would not be baseless to understand it as a prescriber of libertarian media theory. For instance, a couple of reporters asked by the researchers to identify their and organization's priority area, said, "Sheger differs from ERTA which claims to buy in the principles of developmental journalism for its consideration of market and truth."

Sheger FM 102.1 does not have a proper editorial policy. It is a solemnly sorry state that the researcher found out the station disregarded the importance of editorial policy by sticking to *Inside Sheger*, guideline document over years of its history (Kejela: 2010). However, it is a sober relief to learn from Eshete Assefa, Senior Editor that the editorial policy draft was submitted to the Ethiopian Broadcasting Agency (EBA) and they are expecting to launch it after June 2012. The absence of the editorial policy is one among many factors that the researcher observes as to the reason why Sheger sways with unclear priority areas. Yet, apparently as discussed in the aforementioned paragraphs, entertainment oriented programs and societal issues are the major priority areas of Sheger FM 102.1.

4.3. Analysis of the respondents' responses to the questionnaires

As indicated in chapter three, questionnaire is one of the data collecting tools employed by the researcher. It is to be recalled that questionnaire is favored for its convenience to set a background on which further discussions and enquiry points could be developed. Simply, the responses have a capacity to determine the nature of further discussion the intricate connectivity between questionnaires and further discussions is believed establish a delicate and coherent argumentative approach.

4.3.1 Profile of journalists of the two media houses

The response to the first question of research questionnaire indicates that most of the respondents are BA degree holders while a significant number of them are also MA holders. Out of 50 respondents from ERTA who returned the questionnaires to the researcher, 40 of them are BA degree holders whereas 7 and 3 of the rest are MA and diploma holders, respectively.

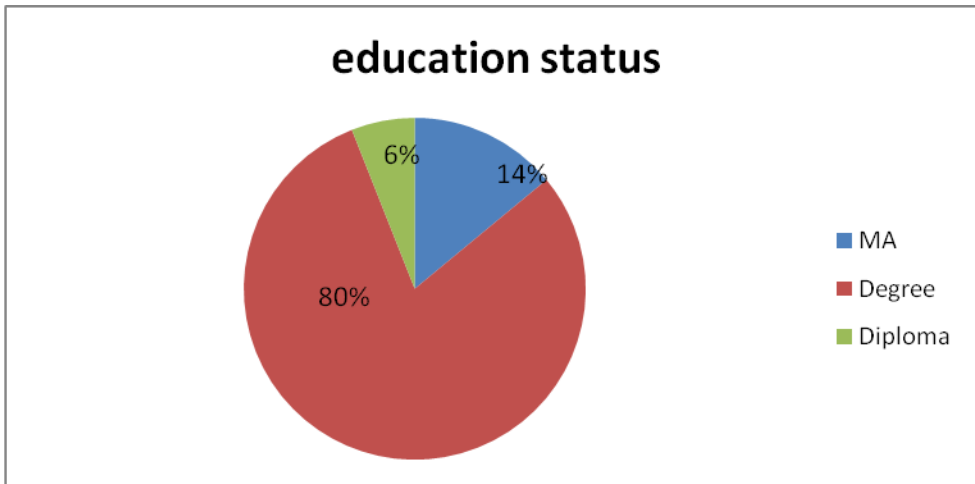


Fig 1: respondents from ERTA

Most of them, about 24 respondents studied social sciences, while 8, 12 and 6 of them journalism and communication, natural science and business and economics, respectively. Experience wise, only seven of the respondents have been working for media for more than 10 years.

Out of 20 questionnaires distributed, only a total of 10 journalists from Sheger FM 102.1 responded to the questionnaires and returned. One respondent is an MA holder, 6 have a BA degree and 3 of them have diploma certificate although they are currently studying courses of extension degree program at different universities in the city. Their field of study is quite distributed across a number of disciplines that include Theatrical Arts, social sciences, mathematics and law. 8 of these respondents have a less than five years experience while two of them have 10 years experience although the majority of their experience is not directly related to journalism.

Therefore, the responses of the respondents signal that the workforce is also well educated and high percentage of journalists have successfully completed a tertiary education. Furthermore, a similarly high percentage of these have attended social

sciences and natural sciences, which tend to give the industry diversified skills across newsrooms and program departments. However, experience in journalism is the ‘most missed’ ingredient from the profile of the respondents.

4.3.2. Freedom of Information Status in the Eyes of Respondents

The researcher believes this part lays the basics that could shape or mold the findings of the study. With utmost regard for this cause-effect relation, respondents were demanded to respond to the same question. They were asked to choose and circle the letter that they believe is the correct answer to the question.

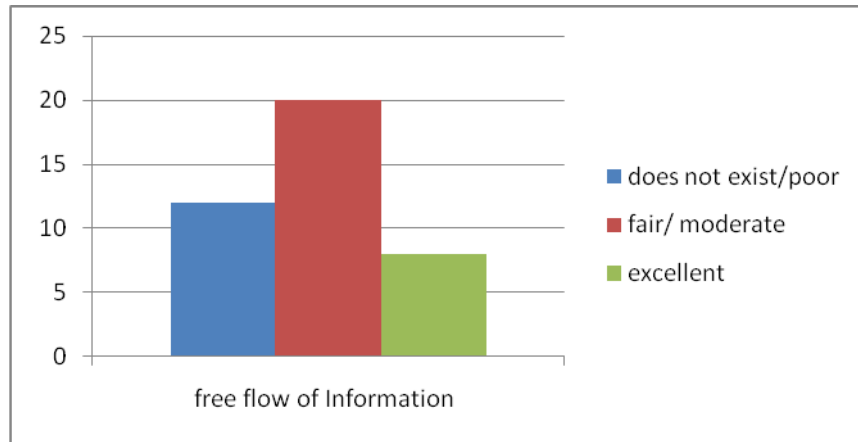


Fig. 2: respondents from ERTA

Respondents from Sheger are almost equally divided between poor and fair/moderate as four of them went for POOR while six of them Fair.

Under this category, respondents from Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency are divided among the three choices although the majority of them think free flow of information fairly exist in Ethiopia. When it comes to Sheger FM, a slightly more than half of the respondents think free flow of information exists while a significant number of them believe free flow of information does not exist.

Before proceeding to the next section, it is essential to discuss the last part of the questionnaire part. Journalists and editors alike were asked to specify whether they are aware of any legal media framework. From the part of the researcher, their response to this questionnaire was deemed important and valued as the main underpinning fact that most likely influence the respondent's further responses.

The finding shows almost all of the respondents from both organizations are aware of the existence of legal media framework. The ratio of 9: 10 recognize the fact Ethiopia is one of a few African countries that have freedom of information law

4.4 Analysis of the interviewees' responses

As already mentioned above, the main objective of questionnaires is due to set a clear course of the study. For example, in the above the discussion presented the perception journalists regarding the existence degree of free flow of information. Therefore, it is of the researcher's convection that the further probe would rather be treated in interview section.

For both the interviewer and interviewee, interview offers a more flexible and understandable approach. Firstly, the interview offers the researcher with an opportunity to observe the verbal and non-verbal communications of the interviewee. On the other hand, it is widely considered that interview gives the interviewed person a maximum chance to express her/him self clearly and strongly expressing oneself. For these and other related reasons, the following points of discussion were sought to be dealt with in interview section of this chapter.

4.4.1 What and how do journalists know about the media laws?

It is to be recalled, from the analysis of the responses to questionnaires section, that most respondents are aware of the existence of freedom of information legal framework. Unfortunately, their knowledge is entirely based on the information they have received from meetings, media and friends. Yet these journalists think that they are aware of those proclamations. Only a few of the interviewees said that they have read the existing media legal frameworks.

Although this is not the intention to conclude reading as the only sources of knowledge, the researcher notes the tendency of the lack of 'seriousness and commitment' to fully understand the proclamation. On equally important terms, it seems important to underline how much does it mean when it comes to their perception of free flow of information and motivation to access information.

It is this earnest concern that leads to the question whether journalists are a problem in limiting free flow of information. Would it be possible their motivation hindered the fact that their knowledge of media law solely depends on 'hearsay'? Those journalists and editors included in the interview spilt in two categories. Those who think the unsatisfactory or inadequate knowledge which is mainly gained through external factors plays a pivotal role in journalist's perception and motivation to access information. On other hand, those who believe it is both ineffective media laws and journalists' wrong perception that contributes to the limited free flow of information.

It appears essential to reflect on the above discussions before moving to the next part. Most of the interviewed journalists and editors have never read the freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation. They admit that they have probably

misunderstood some of the provisions of the law. Nearly half of them think their lack of reading may contribute to free flow of information status in the country. The other group believes that ineffective media laws are as important as journalists' inability to understand it in determining the existence of the free flow of information.

4.4.2. Freedom of information practice in Ethiopia

This section is strongly related to the freedom of information status in the eyes of respondents. Responses of the respondents are categorized into four categories. The first category claims there is Freedom of Information in Ethiopia while the second category emphasis on the commitment of both media practitioners and government to will determine the practice of it. The third category denies both claims by stating there is no free flow of information. Another, the fourth, category emerges when it comes to the question of practice. This category holds the view the freedom of information may or may not be practical. For the supporters of this view, the nature of information being sought determines the practicality of free flow of information.

Though little in number, the first category is of the view that there is 'appropriate' and 'relative' free flow of information. 'Appropriate' to foster free flow of information and 'relative' for there is no absolute freedom of information in anywhere; claims this category. As an indicator for the argument, advocates believe the presence of legal media framework called 'Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information (Proclamation No.590/2008). As mentioned earlier, the supporters of this notions states Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that has promulgated freedom of information laws. However, they admit that its practice is somehow limited. Contrary to the third category,

this category attributes this problem to journalists' lack of commitment to the profession and citizens.

It is clearly noted in this section that the second category represents a large number of the respondents. The majority of respondents from ARTA think FOI and ATI is fairly or moderately practiced. It looks crucial to cite one respondent's response regarding this matter. He responded:

Free flow of information in its absolute sense does not exist anywhere in the world; even in developed democracies. It is relative. With this concept, it shouldn't be fair to demand free flow of information in its absolute form. There is no such a thing in our world. Also, it is an understatement to conclude there is no freedom of information in Ethiopia. I think it would acceptable to state that there is FOI but it's practicality hangs on journalists' and government's commitment.

Most of the respondent or interviewee reflects this notion. The advocates of this category signifies the importance of having media legal framework which is set to encourage citizens' and media's right to freedom of and access to information. They believe freedom of information and the right to access information needs the commitment of government and journalists. One of the two would never realize it. Teshale Bekele, for instance, states: "it is not the presence or absence of legal framework that defines the right to freedom of and access to information but the problem is exercising that right."

The third category thinks there is no freedom of information in Ethiopia. As mentioned earlier, nearly more than half of the interviewees from Sheger FM 102.1 and quite significant number of ERTA journalists firmly believe Ethiopia is nowhere closer to a 'fair' and 'relative' practice of free flow of information. Even if they recognize the existence of legal framework, they claim that legal framework is ineffective. "Having the

freedom of information does not necessarily ensure the right to access to information,” states an interviewee from ERTA. Another interviewee from Sheger FM 102.1 notes that even the proclamation itself deprives citizens the right to access information. She states:

Even these provisions of the freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation provisions play a role in undermining free flow of information. Take a look at sub-article 3 of article 14 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and access to information proclamation. It says, ‘...the response shall in any case be made not more than thirty working days, of the receipt of the request.’ It goes on stipulating the provision which states, ‘ the public relation officer to whom a request for access to a public record is made may extend the period of thirty days ... for further period of not more than thirty working days.’ Basically these articles shun off the free flow of information.

This group also attributes its stance to the unwillingness of government officials who hold information to release it. These officials try to impart those information what they want to the public to know rather than what the public wants to know. According this category, even if journalists put their utmost effort to access information, there is not proper legal framework that provides the journalists the right not to reveal the identity of the source. “More surprisingly,” observes an interviewee from ERTA, “a journalist of critical information won’t go unpunished.” Therefore, Exponents of this category conclude that there is freedom of information proclamation which is not practical.

The last category, as highlighted in the first paragraph of this topic, believes the nature of information journalist demand determines the right to access to information. The exponents of this notion tend to categorize information into two: those which holders would like to release and those which holders would rather hold onto.

An individual who is in charge of public information (i.e. government officers, in this case) would not be willing to give information that he deems unfavorable. It is a tall order

to seek, receive and report information regarding senior government officials' misconduct, human right violation, bad governance and others that raises critical issues of rule of law. Senior Editor, from ERTA, says:

It is very tough. You never allowed anything at all. They (i.e. those in charge, could be from government or private, of that information) never relinquish any information of that sort. In case the journalist dares it, the repercussion could force him to lose his job and he, under the worst scenario, may end up behind the bar.

This group considers freedom of information may be exercised if information 'in demand' is dubbed 'positive' towards the organization or system the information holder. Even there seems no need for journalists to seek such information as it is most likely that they could be invited by those in charge. Indeed, in cases like this journalists are revered and offered a 'freebie' like incentive. The groups or individuals who are in charge of the information show a tendency to view journalists as an 'image builder' and media as a 'loyal channel' that take their message as it is.

4.5. Analysis of the discussions of FGD: What are the major challenges that restricted free flow of information?

Although the above four categories held different belief as to who affected the notion most, they all seem to agree on the presences of challenges in the practice freedom of information. According to the discussants these challenges are due to the problems related to journalists, media houses and political commitment. All these three challenges are widely believed to contribute to the inefficiency of freedom of mass media and access information proclamation.

Two teams of four individuals each took part in the focus group discussion (FGD). Two sessions of discussion conducted; one for each. For the sake of convenience, both teams were given a code name FGD1 and FGD2. With the objective and expectation to evoke a plurality of viewpoints from different individuals of different background, participants from two media houses are mixed up. No team of FGD was made up of participants from the same media only.

It took, on average, an hour and ten minutes to conclude one focus group discussion. Participants of FGD were notified about the topic of discussion a week ahead of the actual day of the discussion. They discussed on the causes of these challenges, what sort of problems are these and how can it contribute to journalists' perception of free flow of information and their motivation to access information?

It must be underlined that in the course of this Focus Group Discussion, no notion was preferred to other by large margin. It was visibly notable that with spontaneous flow of ideas, the enormous and repetitive ideas were gradually trimmed and organized to three major parts. These are low level of journalists' profession, ineffective media houses and lack of political will.

4.5.1 Low level of Professionalism

Professionalism, in any discipline or field of work, indicates the performance. Most frequently, this performance is labeled against the ideal standard set by individuals or groups. A professional person is presumed to attain that set standards. In order to come to certain common understanding regarding the definition of professionalism, it appears indispensable to note that education status does not always define professionalism. Particularly in journalism, education status, as already stressed, shows the degree or

diploma certificate and basic theoretical knowledge of the discipline. However, professionalism is usually the result of education and practices. But sometime only disciplined and efficient practice could produce professionalism.

This is the understanding and scope which is going to take us throughout this part of the focus group discussion. With this definition of professionalism by participants, the group discussion focused on what are those factors that resulted in low level of journalists' professionalism? What are the indicators of unprofessionalism in the industry? These and other related discussion point aimed to trigger active, thoughtful, rich and fruitful deliberation which attempts to enrich the course of the focus group discussion. A number of various viewpoints was raised and discussed during the discussion on these matters. At first instant though those points seem different, after the re-examination of the discussion points, it is possible to summarize and classify the problems into two: lack of commitment and fear of censorship.

4.5.1.1 Journalists' lack of commitment

Conspicuously, professionalism is utterly unattainable without commitment. Integrity, discipline, objective, stamina and experience could produce an immaculate commitment. Specifically, professional commitment in journalism could revolve around keeping the principles of journalism which are truth, objectivity, accuracy, balance and fairness. Practice of journalism in such away signals professional commitment. Easily notable though, the proliferation of professionals marks the prominence of media which are destined to promote free flow of information. This convection as tailored from literature and structured through discussion is believed to provide the sublime set of standards against which the debates are supposed to refer to.

By assessing the practices of journalists with the above parameters, discussants held strong and nearly unanimous belief that commitment is lacking most in both media houses. Observable gaps in areas of the ‘particles/elements’ of professional commitment, indicates the lack of determination. More particularly, the absence of these elements in the practice of journalism is one of the major problems that hindered the free flow of information in Ethiopia as per the discussants convictions. They are of the view that journalists’ indifference to exercise the right to access to information to ensure free flow of information using the existing media legal frameworks is the main setback. According to them, journalists fail to perceive that their job is more than just attending and reporting meetings, workshops, seminars and other splendid public festivals.

Here, it would clarify much more easily if a point raised by a participant from FGD1 is presented. She stated:

I have seen many news reporting. I have done some. Most of mine and of those I have seen and heard are reports of events take place. It would not be considered an exaggeration if I characterize our news reporting practices as a presentation of the summary of whole bunch of events of the meeting or workshop. Journalists, including myself, couldn’t even have the patience and interest to complete the meeting or conference. After a brief attendance and then scramble for the speech papers, most journalists are nowhere to be seen as the day proceeds. I guess, had journalists have a real commitment to the profession and loyalty to the public, staying a bit longer than they do would offer them the chance and knowledge to substantiate their report rather than presenting an excerpt of the speakers speech.

Lack of a sense of responsibility, disloyalty to the public and profession; and inability to act independently are also the crucial ingredients of professionally acceptable commitment. Importantly on equal magnitude, the shortage is vividly evident in journalists’ lack of enthusiasm or initiation for preliminary preparation. Planning and

research are the key activities of preliminary (i.e. pre-production) preparation. In addition to its advantage in idea mapping, identification and definition, planning and research at such early stage are the crucial step in ensuring free flow of information.

But regrettably, it is a glaring truth that planning and research are the most missed from the daily activities of journalists, agreed the attendees of FGD. In their description of its universality across the two media house, discussants underscored this gap is one of the common features to Ethiopian media. Not absolutely bizarre though; they indicated in the discussion that lack of proper and strong preparation before the production of the news has undermined the freedom of information. Regarding this matter an editor discussant from FGD2 noted:

Journalists misunderstand their role when they just show up and do the interview. Honestly speaking, some journalists whether they are from private or public media, do not have a clue of what they came to report. They have to listen to the program moderator or the speaker's speech to catch up with what they came to report. There are clear indicators that the journalist did not do any proper preparation. He or she did not do the planning and research. This is pretty eminent in questions they raise during the interview or press briefing session. The content of the report tells the whole story short.

Participants of both FGD agree on the notion that the journalists are not the only to be responsible regarding the problem related planning and research. Media houses have their fair share in the blame as it will be discussed in the next topic. However, almost all of them take note that journalists' current practice when it comes to planning and research is the other salient fact which strongly explains the existing practices that plays an important role in restricting free flow of information.

4.5.1.2 Self Censorship

Censorship is the suppression of speech or other public communication which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or inconvenient to the general body of people as determined by a government, media outlet or other controlling body. Political censorship occurs when government hold back information from their citizens. This is often done to exert control over the populace and prevent free expression that might foment dissent.

In order to safeguard and promote free expression, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia prohibits any form censorship. The subsequent laws, 1992 Press Law and Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation, have included provisions that clearly ban censorship. Contemporarily, therefore, government reckons the proliferation of newspapers, magazines and books as the indicators of the recognition of freedom of information.

It is against this background that discussants raise censorship as the major form of problem that hinders the right to access to information. Although these groups believe that censorship is officially proscribed, the some provisions of the proclamations and practical test have a ‘chilling effect’. It is this working environment that provokes or leads to self censorship. The discussants from both teams accentuate that political, economic and historical factors are the major factors that ferment self-censorship.

4.5.1.2.1. Political Factors

The political spectrum of the country narrows down the freedom of information and the right to access to information. As highlighted in above paragraph, legal media framework

despite its provisions overtly recognizing the right to access to information, it stipulates a punitive penalty. Article 45 of the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (Proclamation No 590/2008) stipulates the severe penalties that play a 'chilling effect'. This discourages the journalists, editors and or commentators from critical writings. It is to say that the journalist impose a self censoring mechanism. No one wants to serve the highly excruciating punishment.

They argue that the government of Ethiopia and a very few business moguls have repeatedly shown a tendency to impose the invincible and punitive censorship. For instance, a discussant from FGD1 (Sheger FM 102.1) states that the contemporary censorship has a severely depressing impact in the practicality of free flow of information. He summarizes his view like this:

We cannot boldly claim that Ethiopia is a censorship free country. Perhaps, it is possible to argue that there is official bureau of censor and the right to write and expression is recognized in this country. However, I don't see anyone who could claim that there is not impact that may be related to a sense of censorship. In my opinion, it is systematic and subtle but real, severe and politically motivated. We have witnessed that a number of journalists have been imprisoned for their criticism of government and its practices. ...frankly speaking, censorship is always subtly and clearly on our desk.

There are also forms of censorship that are not so obtrusive. Censorship can take place in the forms of intimidation and harassment. One way or the other, journalists strongly perceive censorship, except its manner of applications, is still active in Ethiopia. According to the conclusion drawn from this discussion, this perception of journalists attributes to the loss of motivation and courage to exercise the right to access to information.

4.5.1.2.2 Economic factors

Before proceeding with discussion, it would be important to get a brief insight into the economic situation of journalists. Salary is the only source of income for most of the journalists. Their monthly salary is widely regarded not enough given the ever skyrocketing inflation rate. The number of family members that depend on this income could further complicate the concern. It is rare to find a journalist with other source of income. If there is any, he/she won't be a journalist any more. Of course, it is important to note that the journalism is not one of the most sought careers due to the unattractive benefit packages.

With the belief that this knowledge sets the premises of discussion, it could not be such difficult to understand the interests and preference of journalists to avoid the situations that could have an undesirable consequence on their income. As the result, economic factor, the second most important one, has a power to deprive the journalists' confidence and courage. This is a huge blow to the professional principle. For instances, suppose a reporter loses his job and then the salary for the sake of profession when his/her family entirely rely on this monthly income. Would this be fair? Or wouldn't it be understandable if the reporter chooses to censor himself for the safety of the family? "I cannot say it is not right but believe unfair to lose your job which is the only source of income for you and your family," says a discussant of FGD2 from ERTA.

Particularly, discussants from ERTA seem to put a great deal of emphases on this notion. They claim that they are aware of the importance of verification which might not be possible without access to information. A senior editor from ERTA puts:

Journalists observe a number of misconduct and practices of bad governance. Receive a great deal of public complain or grievance. They openly share it with colleagues and friends. However, when the journalist prepares the news, he/she does not include those issues of his concern. Although he never knew whether his editor could reject or approve it, he censors himself by preparing news that he think would be sign off.

From this quotation, it is quite clear that journalists read the mind of the editor and anticipate what it would be like to give the editor the news script that criticize government. Interestingly, journalists, as will be discussed below, perceive even if the editor approves this nature of news, the editor or the media house for that matter could not guarantee or protection if the government wants punish the reporter that critical news. Particularly when the punishment has the capacity to limit the opportunity of the kinds to go to school and put the whole family in an adverse condition, discussants note, it could be unrealistic to still expect the reporter to be objective, truthful, accurate, investigative and impartial.

Quite simply and realistically, the journalists' top priority is to refrain from reporting critical issues but still could be important to enrich the practice of freedom of information. On other word, it is an effort to avoid any form of reprimand.

Therefore, economic factor is the most powerful invisible or self censorship. Its impact transcends job loss of the journalist. It can go as far as destabilizing the family and society. It is also powerfully for its real capability to enforce self censorship. At times journalists have to ponder seriously before deciding to go for ensuring free flow of information.

4.5.1.2.3 Historical/fear factors

Throughout the history of Ethiopian mass media, it is now only two decades ago since the freedom of expression came onboard. Before the overturn of the fortunes of the country in 1991, Ethiopia experienced an authoritative monarchy followed by a brutal military government. Media, just as ever, was the mouth piece of government. It was not a period when freedom of expression and press freedom was guaranteed. It was an epoch that saw the Censor Bureaus conduct the routinely per and post censorships of newspapers, books and research materials. A number of activists and advocators of freedom of information were thrown to prison and put to death.

Such cruelty act has a long lasting impact that could go beyond the time boundaries. Discussants think those politically and economically motivated measures of the previous governments are still able to spark an apprehension among journalists and media houses alike. According to the accounts from the focus group discussion, the memory of the stiff punishment, detention, execution, intimidation and harassment are fresh and ingrains a strong sense of apprehension; particularly in those journalists' mind who witnessed the period. Although these journalists are aware that this is the new era when censorship is officially prohibited, that memory tend force journalists to careful and constantly use the mechanism wider known as self censorship.

The following quotation highlights the extent the journalists censor themselves in fear of retaliation. An editor's account from ERTA:

Usually editors don't force reporters to prepare news of positive remarks about government. In fact, no reporter came to me with news which is critical of government and its policy implementations. As far as I can recall I haven't turn down or reject that news whatsoever. Usually journalists perceive that editors would not approve that news of critical of

government's misconduct and bad governance. Frankly speaking, I am not sure what to do if a reporter comes up with news that reflects the dissatisfaction or resentment of public over the governance system of the government. Perhaps I would do the same. Yes, it is may be anticipation of apprehension which might come from the historical background of freedom of information.

Discussants from Sheger FM 102.1 share the notion expressed and held by ERTA journalists and editors regarding the impact of historical factor in perpetuating a form of censorship. The slight difference though is journalists and editors from Sheger perceive if the news report is believed to have a serious impact on government; the consequence would also put the existence of the media house in question. Therefore, it looks self censorship could not only meant safe the journalist but also the very existence of the media.

The reporter who took part in the FGD1 notes:

You are aware that whatever you know would not go public though you are pretty sure it is true and deserves media attention. You never know what would be the real reaction of the government. Perhaps it might be positive and government or concerned body could take an appropriate corrective action to improve the situation that caught the public and media attention. Yet, you tend to reject or ignore it expecting negative responses from government. I guess such anticipation has something to do partly with the perennial official practices of censorship which still seems to dictate the journalists' practice in ensuring free flow of information.

Although historical factors, considered by two FGD, the least when compared two political and economic factors in perpetuation of censorship, it plays a 'spiral effect' role in enforcing self censorship. According the summary of the groups, this factor is apparently loosing grips as new generations who didn't experience the previous governance systems are gradually taking the media houses in storm. Yet, they concluded, historical factor will still be a hindrance for free flow of information to certain degree.

4.5.2 Challenges of the media houses

The insufficiency and ineptitude of media organization is not the new finding. Both government and private media organizations are all together considered as the most an ineffective institution in Ethiopia. What would be new finding here may be how such incompetence and lack of self reliance play a role in undermining the information freedom. Lack of enough resources, capacity building, provision of legal protection and process reporting approach are the prime areas where the deficiency of media organizations as per the views of the discussants.

4.5.2.1 Resource Constraint

Resource scarcity has seriously affected the performance of both media houses. The findings of focus group discussion led to the revelation of the shortage of the engine of the media houses. As pinpointed by the discussants, the major inadequacies of resources are evident in areas that include but not limited to materials, human and financial. Without these resources, it is very difficult to run an organization as serious and complex business as media industry.

Decisive material resources such as video camera, vehicle, tape recorder, editing machines and computers are among the ones which are dearly missed in both organizations. In fact, the deficiencies of these resources might have not affected the tow media houses on equal terms. ERTA which is financed by state could not be affected as badly as Sheger FM 102.1. Yet discussants agreed lack of enough transportation has costly affected their ways of information gathering process. It extremely reduces field visits and hampers planning and research works. Similarly the scarcity in video camera,

sound recorder and computers play a pivotal role in undermining the way news gathered and presented.

The other important area of scarcity is human resource. It is related to the software part that comprises experience, skill and knowledge; and hardware part which includes the number and variety of the workers. The general/collective notion of the discussants seems to set the consensus concerning the gap in human resource has halted freedom of information by a large margin. Balanced, accurate, true and objective information gathering and news reporting wouldn't be realized unless human resource is improved with proper adjustment or measurements on regular bases.

One 'real and present' threat regarding human resources is the media managers' perceptions of comfy as long as there is news and programs to be run. Usually quality issue is at the rare end of the editorial agenda. It won't be a surprising shock if such inclination could result in less emphasis on the development of human resources. Over years of their operation, this has been a serious problem for both media houses.

The last but the major problem is financial resources. Stating finance is the foundation of business is a universal fact just like 'the sun rises in the East and sets in the West'. Obviously, it is finance which determines the performance of the media houses. Thus, the consequence of shortage in finance has a multidimensional impact. But for the sake of this study, the discussants were requested to summarize those to the major ones. Firstly it limits the salary paying capacity of the media houses. Lack of competitiveness in the market may lead to the '*brain drain*' as journalists would be tempted to leave the industry and profession for better payment. Besides, more importantly though, the media remain or will become quite a dull business/industry in attracting fresh bloods. Even if new

graduates join the media, it is surely be to buy oneself a time just like the current practice. Journalists and supportive staffs alike consider Ethiopian media as a crucial bridge to other job and organization. This understanding or truth, as elaborated by the discussion, wouldn't do free flow of information any good when it does appear to breed apprehension regarding the long term direction of the media and profession.

Secondly, shortage in finance undermines the administrative and technical performance of the media houses. It plays the disabling role. The challenge of this resource has already made the media houses and journalists alike powerless in their duties. Although the financial capacities of both media houses are entirely at different status, the two are lagged behind their set of objectives and goals due to the dearth in finance. Deficiency in financial resources affects the per diem, purchase and organizational effectiveness. This problem leaves the media institutions at the mercy of business people, advertisers, and the subsidy from government and opposition parties. For example, one from for ERTA of FGD2 said:

For example, there are a number of incoming media request letters. Usually, these letters state that the organization or individual who is requesting media coverage is willing to cover the journalist' transportation cost and per diem. To outsiders surprise but to insiders business as usual, ERTA approves the request and sent the journalist and camera man on such assignment report. In the right mind, it does not look realistic to report anything contrary to the expectations of that organization/individual that pays your per diem, accommodation fees and transportation cost. Under such circumstances, journalist rightly considers reporting is a payback service. Free flow of information and motivation to access information for further verification in order to substantiate report with public and other concerned bodies' concern and/or view is simply looks unrealistic.

Discussants from Sheger FM 102.1 share the same concern though such request is not as frequent as it possibly is at ERTA. This is due to partly because its transmission radius

which only targets Addis Ababa and its soundings; and partly because its medium of transmission which is Amharic and means of transmission which is radio. Despite all these when such an opportunity shows come, it's very difficult to report against the host's expectation.

Therefore, shortage of financial resources has greatly restricted the freedom of information. An expectation and invitation of any form external support to offset this challenge introduces the trend that may curb the free flow of information.

4.5.2.2 Capacity Building Gap

We discussed that most journalists are BA degree graduates in social sciences in the first part of our data presentation and analysis. But later on, under the section which explains the challenges of free flow of information, we found that journalists reporting practice is unprofessional. Even though the findings appear contrasting and paradoxical, in practicality they complement each other. The finding shows that professionalism could not necessary be the outcome of the educational status. In other word, professionalism transcends the various kinds of degree certificates for it is a combination of experience, skill, integrity, endurance and commitment. It has never been an overnight achievement nor been a four year universities stay. Rather it is a learning process.

So what would enhance professionalism? Here comes capacity building training. This is one of the many ways of embedding or injecting professionalism into the current practices of journalists. Trainings offer journalists an opportunity to enrich and update themselves with the ever changing journalism dynamisms, information and communication technology advancements; global and national social, political and economic landscape. Such a capacity building training or practice pays crucial role in

enhancing professionalism. As emphasized by the participants; particularly by those from ERTA, trainings should not only focus on government development strategy. It must be related to the profession.

Discussants highlighted that capacity building trainings/practices are rare at both Ethiopia Radio and Television Agency; and Sheger FM 102.1. All most all of the discussants from ERTA believe the number of trainings is irrelevant in promoting professionalism. Those trainings at ERTA focus on dictating journalists how they should understand and report government policies and development successes. Professional training is a far cry. When it comes to Sheger FM 102.1, discussants note that there is no or very few trainings. Apparently Sheger FM 102.1 management team seems to be either unaware of or overlooked the importance of the training. Even these discussants from Sheger underline that they were not properly and officially briefed about the guidelines, code of conduct and the editorial policy of the station leave alone taking a basic and formal professional training.

Lack of investment in capacity building goes beyond unprofessionalism. It has a negative implication or connotation. It is not only the current freedom of information is in taters but also the future trend of the right to access to information is in doubt. There will not be a vibrant and free media unless the journalists become professional which could not be possible without capacity building. If the media houses fail to do this, it would be anything more than naivety to expect other institutions to do the training for them.

4.5.2.3 Inability to provide journalists with legal protection

A number of controversial views surround the notion that media houses should provide the provision of legal protection to journalists. Other than the general laws of the land,

should media houses provide legal protection for their journalists? In fact, media must be at the forefront in protecting its journalist from intimidation and any form of act that intended to undermine the professionalism. This legal protection should be extended to practitioners both during the news collection process and after the reporting. Journalists must feel the sense of security and safety while on duty. Basically, such guarantee or assurance will lead to the revitalization of journalists' commitment which in turn would become a cornerstone for the promotion of free flow of information.

It is this school of thought that underpins the argument that media houses should provide the journalists from unnecessary acts of government and businesses tycoons. More than any institutions or group of individuals, it is the media organization that must show real concern for the security of journalists. When media houses take concrete measures towards protecting their journalist from false accusations, journalist's motivation to access information which definitely is a huge success in promoting free flow of information.

Discussants of both FGD emphasized the lack of provision of legal protection from their respective media houses. Particularly those from ERTA underlined the problem it creates in embedding the culture of self censorship. Weird enough, participants stated that ERTA falls very short of providing before and after news reporting legal protection

Discussants from Sheger FM 102.1 believe the scenario is a bit different from their colleagues' situation at the other institution. They feel the organization would not let it happen without a fight if it happens to come. Yet, it is important to note that they do not know whether the radio station has any guideline that stipulates legal protection to

journalists. What they are clear with is that Sheger FM 102.1 has hired a lawyer who regularly advises the media house on a number of law related issues.

That presence and boldness of the lawyer seems to raise the expectation of the journalists. However, they think although that a little bit effort is a positive start/sign, it does not still encourage journalists to further commit themselves to access information. Journalists do not want to risk their livelihood and life for partly due to the absence of unclear provision of legal protection and partly due to the lack of commitment as discussed in previous section.

It is understood from the discussion that lack of provision of legal protection has an impact in enhancement of free flow of information. Journalists' feeling of a sense of insecurity due to the ineffective and unclear provisions of legal protection has discouraged journalists to commit themselves to access information in spite of the aggressive nature of information holders. In the face of repressive and vicious repercussions, media houses lack of commitment to provide their journalist legal protection affect the public from benefiting from the free flow of information.

4.5.2.4 Lack of process reporting system

As discussed in review literature, truth is multifaceted and never final. It is intricate for its variety in concept and reality; and journalistic truth is never final for there is/ will be new twists and development. News reporting, as repeatedly explained, is profoundly influenced by deadline. Journalists and media houses alike are urged to meet the dead line while ensuring the objectivity and truthfulness of the news. Perhaps, due to the time factor, journalists could have missed out some features of truth. Similarly, there may be new development since the first news. This is a verification process.

If media house does not have this system in place, it neglects not only the principle of verification but also the free flow of information. Under the absence of process reporting mechanism, journalists are forbidden the opportunity to review and reflect on the first news report. Therefore, process reporting gives the journalists and media houses a chance to report a bigger picture of the original news with various view points.

The discussants agreed on that both media houses do not encourage process reporting. At both ERTA and Sheger FM 102.1 what attracts the editors and journalists most is reporting the original incident. Once the reporting done, there is no or less attention given to the new development. Usually, the incident that needed verification goes on-air due the obvious time factor. Contrary to professional expectance- which is a verification by keeping in touch with the new development and report- , both media organizations seems to turn a page on it not refer it anymore.

However, it is important to note that the discussants also agreed on the notion that media houses are not the only responsible organs for the absence of process reporting. Journalists contribute to the problem. They claim if journalists be able to come up with new development there may be a considerable chance of securing green light from the editors provided the news is worthy of second chance. The discussion highlighted there seems no/ unclear idea about the process reporting among the managements of ERTA and Sheger FM 102.1 and journalists let alone applying and developing the mechanism.

4.5.2.5 Public –private media Polarization

Several private newspapers were started since the introduction of freedom to information and expression. Just like the early history of press in America, these presses focused on attracting readers and expanding their circulation to generate more revenue. As the result,

they introduced sensational stories which are usually about the government and its officials. Contrary as it were, government media maintained its traditional role which was reporting only success stories of the government. Such is the cause that gave birth to private-government dichotomy.

With this brief preamble, participants of the focus group discussion agreed this situation has hindered the free flow of information. They note it is only very rare occasions the two media institutions refer to each other as the source of their news. There is high tendency to reject each other's news and label it a trash and unworthy of news.

4.5.3. Lack of Political Will

Adoption and implementation of freedom of information are two different matters. The decree of the free flow of information precedes the practices. Without the adoption or ratification of freedom of information laws; it is unimaginable to think the implementation of it. However, it does not necessary mean that the presence of freedom of information law indicate the existence of free flow of information. It depends on both the existence of legal framework and its effective implementation. Studying these two complimentary facts, what can surely be relied at this moment in time is that Ethiopia has adopted the legal framework. As discussed in the previous section, this reality was acknowledged by all the participants. What is under discussion in this section is its practicality.

There are three main challenges that significantly limit the realization or effective implementation of freedom of information laws. These are unprofessionalism of journalists, insufficiency of media houses and lack of political commitment/will. We have already discussed the first two under the previous sections. In this section, we are

going to discuss the rest that discussants consider also plays crucial part in ensuring the effective implementation of media laws.

Government Ministry, Bureaus and offices can be categorized into three parts based on their commitment or willingness to put the adopted freedom of information law of the country to practices. They can be regarded as open/willing, average and poor. Although the number of such government bodies is rare in Ethiopia, there are a few ministry offices that release information either on the bases of requests from journalist or by their own as per the provisions of the proclamation. They offer a relatively easy access to information. 'Average' indicates the second behavior or practices of government offices. With usually unpredictable conditions and to a certain extent, such offices tend to allow journalists an average access to information. However, journalists with critical view and probing questions are frequently unwelcomed guest even. The third type of government office is totally unwilling to release any kind of information. Relationship between such offices and media is largely a shaky one. Discussants also describe this type as media 'skeptics' for the various tactics deployed by such offices to avoid media security. More importantly and surprisingly, these government offices are their renowned t open and strong refusal to release information.

Discussants were asked to reason out as why some government offices became media 'paranoid'. Their reasoning can be summarized into two major problems. These are lack of awareness and culture of secrecy. According to the discussion, these are the key setbacks that made the difference among the offices of government both at national and regional level. However, besides these, around one two to three of the members (from

Sheger 102.1) out of the whole participants of FGD believe that some government offices are also deliberately manipulating the legal framework.

4.5.3.1 Low Awareness level

In real terms, freedom of information is relatively a new concept to Ethiopia. It could not be a super surprise though if its effective implementation seems to be entangled with lack of awareness. Discussants view that quite a few government offices never felt at ease to understand the law and implementation of this law as per the terms of media proclamations. Lack of proper introduction, misguided approach and erroneous conclusions about FOI played a cumulative role in limiting the awareness level of the government representatives. On the other hand, there is a fair reason that may hint that there is a sheer act of purposeful ignorance of the issue from the high government officials. Yet, it could be argued that even such deliberate actions are fundamentally regarded as lack of awareness.

Either way, discussants consider the lack of political commitment generates a trend of information regulation by government. It could not be stated otherwise more eloquently and strongly than noting the contemporary practices that information are mainly under the supervision of the minister/head of the ministry/ bureau. It was highlighted that information is not in the hands of appropriate officers; particularity not in the dominion of public relations officer. In most government offices, there is a tendency that only a few high government representatives are mandated to decide what to release and not. It seems there is role confusion here. The Role of public relations officer is not sovereign as it appears to be in the proclamation of freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information. Or it may look as if public relation officers are merely underdogs.

Discussants agree that it is very much unrealistic in Ethiopia to send a request to and expect to receive information from public relation. Although public relation officers' viewpoints were not sought and not part of this research, this is the most likely scenario as to why PR officers tend to shy away from media requests.

Most of the discussants spilt between two notions when it comes to the reasons for the persistence of lack of political commitment. More than half of discussants from ERTA think that it is due the fact that effectively implementation is usually realized after years of trial and error. They firmly believe it is a natural progressive process. The reason, according to this group, is purely out of misunderstandings which will be propelled to perfection through processes. They admit that these processes could be speedup and shortened; or dragged on and prolonged by the efforts which government exerts to realize the effective implementation of freedom of information. However, most discussants from Sheger FM 102.1 think senior government officers do not want to the decentralization and democratization of information. Although freedom of information law is in place, government does not want to commit itself to its implementation. According to this group, if government is so serious about freedom of information, it could have trained public relation officers and gave them more power to deal properly with media request as per the provisions of the proclamation. They conclude that government is not ready to open up its system of governance to the public and media scrutiny.

4.5.3.2. Culture of Secrecy

Secrecy is widely considered as an integral part of Ethiopian cultures. Unfortunately, it is practical and uniform through nations, nationalities and peoples of the country.

Information sharing has never been a tradition in this country. As a source of power and wealth, information has been a jealously guarded secret. This is the case in government, businesses and private life. Similarly, secrecy plays a significant role in government offices as well.

It was discussed that many government officials are not open, transparent and straightforward. These officials ignore their role in opening up the government system and avail a device that could enable the public to exercise its right to access information. They tend forget that it is their duty to ensure free flow of information and public's right to access this information. Discussants admit secrecy is not the only factor but plays a role in the continuations of the restriction the free flow of information.

Discussants agree on the notion that secrecy is not only a challenge to the government officers but also to journalists. Somehow, the process of news collection, selection and reporting is affected by this cross-cutting culture. Chances are journalists fail to raise probing or critical questions when presented with opportunities. Indeed this is not the mere justification for the journalists' failure to be up to the expectations; improper way of addressing the officials indicates the power of the culture secrecy. Therefore, although this section does not specify how much secrecy affects the free flow of information, the bottom line is it plays a crucial contributing factor in tightening up the political will to ensure freedom of information.

4.5.3.3 Mistrust between government and media or journalists

Naturally and historically government and media has been a 'dearly' to each other. More often they fall in endless squabbles. Their sources of conflict usually rest on information.

it is repeatedly said that information is power. This analogy leads to the understanding that their conflict is about power.

But equally notable, they could not realize their objective without each other. Thus, their co-existence and respect for each other's role and responsibility has the advantage. Government as a source of information and media as information seeker and disseminator should be guided by certain set of convection.

The truth, as participants argued, is repressive rather impressive of each other. Government considers media, particularly private ones, as 'clueless' and 'reckless' partner of oppositions political parties while media, private media, perceive government as undemocratic and corrupt institution. According to the discussant this situation has played in limiting the information flow.

4.6. Perception and motivation of Journalists

From the above discussion, it is understood that journalists' perception regarding the existence and practice of free flow of information is divided. Some of them believe there is free flow of information except for journalists' lack of eagerness and commitment to make it happen. It is also important to recall that journalists have no motivation to access information from the previous discussions and analysis.

All results from interview, FGD and personal observation indicate that this group seems to highlight the current lost of motivation to access information is baseless. The second group has almost same viewpoint except this party also considers government as the one of the major contributor to the ineffective implementation of freedom of information law. According to the supporters of this notion, journalists' loss of motivation is partly due to

government regulation of information and partly due to journalists' low level of professionalism.

On the other end, there is a group who believe there is no freedom to information in practice. According to the proponents of this view, there is only legal framework which is yet to be put to actions. They reckon, in practice, government is still unwilling to open up opportunities for the media and public to access information. Thus government uses indirect censorship mechanisms, intimidation and detention. This group concludes that the lack of political will discouraged journalists who want to access information in order to serve the public and profession.

The last group which bases its argument on the nature of the information requested shares the viewpoint of the rest to certain extent. If the information being requested is of positive nature to government, although it might not be such a swift response, the information seekers will surely receive it. This scenario could play some stimulating role in motivating journalist to pull things together further verification. However, they observes, if the information being sought appears critical of government and deemed sensitive nature, it won't be an issue of discussion leave alone granting it. According to this group, therefore, journalists' perception of rejection and intimidation, to the worst undermines their motivation to access information.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Recommendations

The data which were collected over a month was presented, discussed and analyzed in the last chapter. In a bid to set an insight into the nature of information the media houses could value most, the major priority areas were discussed. Without further due, discussion and analysis of data collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion were dealt with thoroughly and scientifically. It was noticed that researcher's personal observations were inculcated in all parts of the data presentation and analysis. This chapter, therefore, has summarized the findings of the research and forwarded major recommendations.

5.1 Conclusion

As mentioned above in the previous chapter, ERTA and Sheger FM 102.1 have different areas of priority. When ERTA values development and democratization as its main objective, Sheger looks to put a great deal of emphasis on entertainment and market oriented programs. The identification of priority areas was to highlight what kind of information journalists would go after as per their organization objective. News framing from the view of their priority areas is the widely practice in both media. Although journalists tend to seek the information related to their organization's priority areas, it was found that journalists have an interest to go beyond that area of focus. Indeed, even information which is related to the priority areas is not freely and easily found.

It was also found that most journalists are BA degree holders in social sciences while a significant number of them are MA and diploma holders in various disciplines. There is strong evidence to conclude that the workforce is highly educated. But this must not lead to the confusion when it comes to examining professionalism level of journalists in the

country. As the findings made clear, there is no direct relationship between the two. Experience, one of the main enabling linkages between them, is the big concern as only 7 out of the total 50 have more than 10 years direct work experiences.

All journalists, who were approached by the researcher, are aware of the presence of freedom of information legal frameworks. Most of these journalists' knowledge of this legal framework is based on how and where they heard from. It is imperative to underline that only insignificant number of journalists and editors alike have read the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information proclamation. Basically, their awareness or knowledge is based on what have they heard from friends, colleagues, meeting, parliament sessions, workshops and media. Interestingly, all of them have a firm belief that their current knowledge of free flow of information falls far short of the expectations. In other word, they consider they could have committed themselves a bit more to get to know what the provisions proclamation through reading.

Journalists' perception is divided into four when it comes to the implementation or practice of the legal framework. Most of the interviewees from ERTA think that free flow of information is fairly exist while a slightly more than half of those from Sheger 102.1 consider there is no freedom of information in practice. The other group (i.e. from both media houses) thinks the practicality of freedom of information law depends on the 'nature of information in demand'. According to this group, if information custodian (usually government) dubs the journalist's request as positive, it is most likely that that information released. But, it notes, free flow of information could not be more than an epic story or fairy tale when the 'custodian' concludes such information is not in the best interest of the office. Quite a few of those from Ethiopia Radio and Television Agency

perceive that free flow of information is never in doubt since the promulgation of media legal frameworks.

It is fair to underscore that most the journalists, editors and members of management team from both media houses agree on the notion that implementation or practicality rate of freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation is very slow. Unprofessionalism of journalists, challenges of media houses and lack of political will are the major contributing factor for the underperformance although there is a difference in magnitude of emphasis discussants gave to each these problems.

Lack of commitment is one of the indicators of unprofessionalism of journalists. Over several occasions reporters fail to commit themselves to the principles or standards of journalism. Shortage of research and planning couple with the lack of charisma undermined the free flow of information in practice. The other reason which breeds unprofessionalism is self censorship. As per the summary of the discussion, self censorship stems from political, economic and historical factors. The current practices of journalists' imprisonment and loss of job added to the apprehension due to the recent historical background contribute to the factors that still perpetuate unprofessionalism.

The inefficiency of media houses is one of those factors that played a role in the restriction of the practicality of freedom of information law. Shortage in resources is one the main problems that affected the media capacity. There are significant shortages in material, human and financial resources. In an impulse to meet their target objectives, these media houses are seen relying on external body. It would not be an exaggeration or anything at all for that matter if it is concluded that the opportunity to ensure free flow of information rests on at the mercy of this external organ. Capacity gap is another factor

that undermined the media's role in promoting information freedom. Particularly, journalists' capacity building in areas of basic skills of the profession and technology is the dearly missed from both media houses. The third factor is lack of the provision of legal protection to journalists. Particularly; journalists from ERTA accentuated that this is their biggest concern if they are to risk their life and family to ensure freedom to information. Lack of process reporting mechanism is the last factor that led to the insufficiency of media. Both media houses and journalists tend to overlook the process of verification and new development since the first news.

Reluctance of government to realization the implementation of freedom of information reduced the practicality of free flow of information. According to the discussion, government offices are unwilling to release information as per the request of the journalists though regrettable such request is rare. For one thing, information is not in hands of public relations officers and even if it is, they are not in a position to give information. Their power is not anything more than nominal. On other hand, be it public relations officer or minister commenting on the lack of effective and efficient implementation of government policy is tantamount to opposing the government. Discussants are also of the view that culture of secrecy has forced government officials to avoid openness and transparency.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the above the findings the following recommendation are forwarded.

It is important to note that education status does not necessary reflect the professional standards. According to the above discussions, most of the work forces are well educated. The discussion also highlighted that there is a low level of professionalism in both media

houses. Lack of proper training, experience, apprehension of intimidation and detention are the main factors. Therefore, the following action points are recommended.

- Proper and continuous capacity building training with the objective to improve the current low level of professionalism should be put in place in media houses. These trainings should focus on journalism dynamisms, technological advancement and global political and economic situation. It is profoundly significant if media houses introduce or strengthen the notion of ‘learning and sharing while working’ system where reporters, editors, media managers and other concerned body will have a forum to enhance the journalism practice.
- Retaining experienced journalists and establishing an experience sharing practices approach between the seasoned/experienced and young/inexperienced journalists. This offers young journalists an inspiration and role model from which they could draw life time lessons. Maximizing the opportunity to hold to experience-rich individualism will also play a magnificent role in the sustainability and growth of media industry.

Ethiopia Radio and Television Agency; and Sheger 102.1 FM are considered an ineffective when it comes to ensuring free flow of information. Shortage of resources, capacity building gap, lack of the provision of legal protection to journalists and absences of process reporting system are the major indicators of the insufficiency of the media houses. Thus, the following recommendations are forwarded. These are:

- Media houses should avoid dependence another external organ as a source resource through enhancing their capacity of generating enough income. One of

the crucial ways to improve income is by attracting more audiences which could entice advertisers. Audience attractions and retention cannot be possible without presenting credible and true information which in turn never be realized without the media house's and journalist's commitment. Human resource refers to labor, skill and knowledge of workers. As already recommended above, both media houses should device effective training mechanism which encourages proper training for proper individuals.

- Media houses should provide their journalists a legal protection which plays a role in an ensuring free flow of information by accessing to information. The process may have a negative repercussion to the one from which information taken and thus could seek a retribution. It is essential to ensure journalists that they are secured as far as their reports are in line with the editorial policy of the organizations.
- Both media houses are recommended to put in place a system that encourages journalists to verify their report since the first issue of the news particularly regarding matters of serious interest. Such system helps journalist to arrive at objective truth as much as it does contribute to the promotion of effective implementation of freedom of information.

Lack of commitment from government officials to deregulate information is also among the reasons that undermined the full scale implementation of freedom of information. It was discussed that government officials have lack of awareness and thus tend to deny media and public an access to information. Discussants also point out that culture of

secrecy plays a role in denying this access. In compliance with this conclusion, the followings point of consideration is recommended. This is:

- There must be political will to deregulate information. Government officials should be transparent and open to media and public. Information regulation or centralization should be prohibited as per the freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation.
- Public relations officers should be given more power to reject and/or approve information requests as stipulated in the proclamation. This could reduce the efficiency and timely response to the information requests from journalists

Generally, it appears exceedingly important to note that media- government relationship should be healthy relationship which based on loyalty to the public and profession. The researcher views ‘Cat-Rat’ game between these massive institutions may not do neither of them for they desperately need each other. Both should understand neither of them could realize the practice of freedom of information. It should be highlighted only an effective collaboration and concerted effort from both sides will have a tangible and desirable result regarding the free flow of information.

Finally, the private – government media sectarianism should be avoided if it is to realize the freedom of information in Ethiopia. Both government and private media houses should reach consensus or understanding on the fact they are aiming be impartial, truth and accurate in their reporting for the sake the public and country. Obviously, if they are able to provide each other a source of news or views tips, such collaboration offers the audience with more comprehensive information.

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Appendix

A. Questionnaires

Addis Ababa University

Graduate School of Journalism and Communication

Dear Respondents

The purpose of these interview questions is to study how journalists' perception about free flow of information and their motivation access to information. your genuine and accurate answers to these questions would greatly contribute to the outcome of the research. I would like to assure you the answers you give to these questions are going to be used for the research purpose only. Thank you.

1. Respondents' profile

1.1 Name_____.

1.2 . Age _____

1.3. Sex _____

1.4. Educational level. A) MA/MSc, (B) BA/BSc, (C) Diploma, (D)12th complete,
(E) other

1.5. Field of study-----.

1.6. Occupational level-----

1.7. Experience in Journalism -----

2. What does free flow of information means to you?
3. Do you think there is free flow of information in Ethiopia? (A) Yes and (B) No
4. Do you know that there is freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation 590/2008? (A)Yes and (B) No.
5. How did you come to know what you think know now about the media law of the country? From: (A) friend/s, (B) media, (c) meeting, workshop, symposium, parliament debate and others and (D) by reading

Thank you

B. Interview Questions

- What do you know about the freedom of information legal framework in Ethiopia?
- How did you come to know what you already now?
- Do you think free flow of information practiced as per the provisions of the freedom of mass media and access to information proclamation 590/2008?
- Do you believe your perception of free flow of information influence your motivation to access information?

C. Interview guides for focus group discussion

- What are the major challenges that restricted free flow of information
- Can journalists' perception about the practice of freedom of information influence their motivation to access information?
- What are the possible ways forward?

