



**INFLUENCE OF EDITORS ON FOOD SECURITY COVERAGE IN
THE ETHIOPIAN PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS: FOCUS ON THE
REPORTER, CAPITAL AND FORTUNE NEWSPAPERS**

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia had been facing the challenges of ensuring food security for decades. The challenge is still with us. As a result, programs aimed at poverty alleviation, poverty reduction and food security have been prepared and implemented by successive regimes. The significance of the efforts is such that they deserve the best media coverage they could get – for, the successful implementation of the programs as well as the overall efforts requires that they should be brought to the attention of stakeholders, especially the public. And this is the prerogative of the editors, who determine the content of newspapers. The importance of editors in the press is hard to overemphasize. It is the editors that decide the content of the newspapers and the stories that get published and read by the public. Behind the important roles that the media plays – from informing the public to agenda-setting – there are the editors that do the decisions on what to inform and what kind of agenda to set for the public. The decisions of the editors, in their turn, are shaped by several factors, including beliefs, ideologies and values – personal as well as social. These are among the host of variables that influence the overall perspective of analysis and content of the whole newspaper and individual stories. This study attempts to investigate the factors that promote or hinder the editor from offering the necessary coverage that food security issues deserve. It specifically tried to look into the attitude and knowledge of private newspapers editors.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Ethiopia has been affected regularly by major drought related disasters during the previous 35 years: in 1973-74, 1984-85, 1999-2000, 2001-2002, and 2005-2006. Although during these years the country has made considerable efforts to build its capacity to prepare for and respond to drought related disasters, they still remain challenges (Grünewald et al., 2006).

Ethiopia faces both chronic and transitory food insecurity problems. The main reasons for food insecurity are land degradation, drought, high population pressure, low input subsistence agriculture, small farm size and landlessness. As a result, million of farmers have been facing serious food security problems for decades. Even during favorable rainy seasons and good harvest opportunities, most of these households could not feed their families for more than 6 months from their production. As a result they depend on food aid for their survival (MoARD, 2003).

Since the mid 1980s images of severe drought and large-scale starvation have become inexorably linked to Ethiopia. The Poverty Assessment for Ethiopia (World Bank 2006) indicates that in 1999/00, 42.2 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, while 22.5 percent of households were extremely poor and lived below the food poverty line of 1650 Cal per person per day. Most of these households are engaged in

subsistence farming on small plots of degraded land, subject to the vicissitudes of the weather. (MoARD, 2006)

Despite some improvement in aggregate production in recent years due to expansion of land under cultivation and fertilizer use, *per capita* food production in Ethiopia has been declining as high population growth rates contributed to a decline in farm sizes, while environmental degradation deepened.

The national food security profile, compiled by the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and Commission (DPPC), shows that over a period of two and half decades the proportion of Ethiopians that have been affected by drought and famine rose from 4% in the 1970s to over 20% during 2002/ 2003 (EEA/EEPRI, 2004). Although this trend is clearly affected by recurrent adverse weather conditions, it is also a sign of the deteriorating food production capacity and coping mechanisms in the country. Over the last three to four decades, a large proportion of the population has been affected by drought and famine, with variations from year to year. (DPPC, 2005)

As result, the Government of Ethiopia has been annually launching international emergency appeals for food aid for over two decades now. The annual emergency assistance was channeled to meet the consumption needs of both chronic and transitorily food insecure households. The amount of assistance (estimated at about US\$265 million a year on average between 1997 and 2002) saved many lives – although evaluations have shown that it often arrived late relative to need and was unpredictable for both planners

and households. The delays and uncertainties meant that the emergency aid could not be used effectively and did little to protect livelihoods, prevent environmental degradation, generate community assets, or preserve household assets (physical or human capital). Thus, despite the large food aid inflows, household-level food insecurity has remained both widespread and chronic in Ethiopia. (MoARD, 2006)

1.1.1 Overview of the food security challenges and the role of the media

Successive Ethiopian governments, the Imperial and the military regimes as well as the incumbent, have worked a lot to ensure food security alongside promoting developmental activities. A number of food security programs have been devised including the food-for-work and resettlement programs, along with development activities such as expansion of irrigation schemes, water and land conservation and environmental protection. Nonetheless, food insecurity continues to challenge the efforts of the government and development agents.

The EPRDF government recognizes sustainable development as the only solution to bring about food security – while it also stresses the need for offering a continued assistance in the mean time. According to the five year plan [2006-2010] the government has included a food security program prepared jointly with development partners (MoFED, 2006). According to the five-year plan, two issues should be focused upon in the course of implementation of the food security program: Firstly, assisting the farmers to withstand lack of food with the help of the little resources they might have; and secondly, liberating them from dependency on food aid. Apart from offering food

assistance [worth 2.5 billion Br] to the millions exposed to chronic and transitory food insecure, food security efforts included resettlement [targeting 2.2 million people] and irrigation programs. The program has been under implementation since 2003 GC in most of the chronically food insecure woredas (Ibid). According to the document, the implementation of the program to ensure food security had been going on for a decade now and would be concluded this year, which marks the end of the five-year PASDEP period.

While one can find plans to ensure food security in the PASDEP document prepared five years ago, the food security situation currently on the ground at the end of the plan period may not be that easy to locate. How many food insecure woredas have benefited from the program that has been under implementation since 2003? How many households have parted with life under food aid dependency? These are some of the questions that stakeholders in the food security conditions in Ethiopia would badly need to know – but they could only know if they could get answers through the media. Of course, one would hear stories of improving living conditions told by the public media owned and run by the government.

Since efforts geared towards poverty reduction and ensuring food security are closely interconnected with good governance, success stories are more likely to take more airtime and pages in the public media than news of failures. Needless to say, the need for a more impartial reporting cannot be met solely with what comes through the government media.

The role of the media in promoting good governance in the sense of ensuring the “careful management of the national economy” can be played effectively and to the best outcome only in the existence of a “strong, independent and responsible media landscape within a society” (Kefyalew, 2008). An open and responsible media can play an important role in the fight against poverty – there by ensuring food security (Ibid).

Firstly, by increasing the accountability of both businesses and governments on the one hand, and allowing citizens to make better-informed decisions, on the other, it promotes and encourages good governance, without which the battle against poverty cannot be won. Secondly, as a watchdog against corruption, it can help ensure that greater importance be attached to development issues in the allocation of resources, while at the same time strengthening the institutions responsible for promoting the overall development of society. Thirdly, it can contribute to combating the exclusion and marginalization of the poor. The significance of this is in the fact that ‘poverty is not limited to lack of resources; it is a lack of empowerment as poor people are generally unable to participate fully in society and earn a living. Thus, mere provision of additional resources may not be enough to lift them from their deprivation. They also need increased capabilities. Only then can they gain control over their lives and learn how to productively use whatever resources are available. Providing the poor with access to the media is an important step in achieving the objective of reducing poverty through sustainable development.

To do all that and much more there needs first the existence of a strong responsible and independent media. And several factors contribute to the strength, independence and sense of responsibility of the media. First and foremost comes the question of freedom: “Only when journalists are free to monitor, investigate and criticize the public administration’s policies and actions can good governance take hold” (Ibid).

The freedom enjoyed by journalists, though, cannot determine the nature and size of media content. Still, an overview of the Ethiopian press should be made and the extent of freedom of the editors understood before looking into their role in shaping the content of a press product.

1.1.2 The Ethiopian Media: A brief historical overview

Despite changes in ideology and structure, the history of the press in Ethiopia remains dominated by political devotion on both the privately owned and state controlled media outlets. The history of Ethiopian media has been virtually identical to that of the political history. Burdened with a history of long years of repression under the ownership of authoritarian regimes, all that the media could do has been little more than serving as a mouthpiece to those in power. (Gale, nd).

Put otherwise, the function of the media (print and broadcast) has remained consistently the same despite the change in governments: to serve the Government in power and promote its policies. (Nolawi, 2006) And the fact that they poorly exercised their agenda setting and watchdog roles could be explained as much by the extent of freedom they

could exercise free of harm as by the influences exerted by editors working on individual stories.

As noted clearly by Kensicki (2004), the public counts on the media for information of all sorts including information related to drought and famine. Further, even though most of the relief work is carried out by the Government and non-government organizations, the media spur the global communities and push the national government to properly address the problem (Philo, 1993). Among other factors, the way the media frame these humanitarian crises contributes to difference in level of response. Thus media studies should also pay attention to the way the media frame a given problem (Bullock et al., 2001)

In countries with developed democracies, the media plays a powerful role that it is often referred to as the Fourth Estate, [after the Executive, Legislative and the Judiciary]. It plays probably a more important role than the three proper branches since it is through the media that a nation communes with itself and with other nations beyond (Stepenhurst, 2000). In Ethiopia, however, the press has for long been facing hurdles in the course of exercising its roles - from informing and educating the public on current and priority issues to evaluating the activities of the government, making sure that it is functioning within its constitution mandate, respecting the rights of citizens. (Nolawi, 2006)

The efforts of the media alert the public and others through reporting the news accurately and promptly, and of relief organizations to motivate public and governmental support

and save human lives. It is also part of a pivotal function of the media as a watchdog in the society, to highlight abuses, encourage better policies and legislation, and ensure that governments follow through with their commitments and also by pointing out deviant behavior and holding it up to ridicule. (M. Perse, 2001)

The responsibility of agenda setting and exercising watchdog roles vests on the editor. As it is clearly indicated by various writers (White, 1950; Gieber, 1964; Bass, 1969; Dimmick, 1974; Schudson, 1997; and Shoemaker; 1996), journalists make choices everyday - what stories to cover, which sources to consult, whose doors to knock at, what question to ask, who to believe, what angle to take, what quotes to use, how much context to include, what words to use, what pictures to use, [and, most importantly,] what to leave out. The choices are not entirely free choices, Harcup (2004) notes, they are not taken in a vacuum, sometimes there will be orders from high, but for the most part they are still choices of the journalists. [These choices are based on various considerations].

And it is these choices that determine whether food security issues should be included in a given issue of a weekly or a daily newspaper; and, hence, whether the public would hear about them or not.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Some believe that the Ethiopian private press is currently in a state of incapacitation arguing that it could have made the best out of the unprecedented level of freedom it could enjoy. The longstanding restriction imposed on local media since the imperial

regime on reporting famine, drought and conflict has somehow eased in the last decades. Still, the private media at present are not providing strong and in-depth analysis of existing food security issues, policies and programs. Ethiopia being one of the countries affected by food insecurity, responsible editors and reporters of newspapers should have found it a worthy task for them to arm themselves with a clear grasp of the key issues. Instead, they seem to be focused on entertainment, echoing western media with little skills in reporting or professional ethics. (Nolawi, 2006)

In view of the vital role that the print media could play in addressing [or dismissing] issues of public concern, editors do not seem to be well aware of the power they wield as well as the costly consequences that are bound to follow every editorial decision they make.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The media are uniquely placed to catalyze and nurture public discussion and action on hunger, says Sen (2003). Entman (1993) further notes that media define the problems, suggest solutions and attribute responsibilities for problem-solving. Andsager and Powers (1999) also highlight that events such as drought and famine have multiple aspects; the media select and cover some of them due to resource and other constraints. As a result the media are expected to play their watchdog and agenda setting roles in addition to informing the public on important issues. It is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media that plays an influential part in how issues gain public attention.

In Ethiopia, as Gale (nd) argues, both the public and private newspapers have respective shortcomings that have hindered the development of the media as an independent and critical enterprise as experienced in many democratic western nations. Thus, journalism in Ethiopia has not developed to be the “fourth estate” in the society. (Ibid)

Mekuria, however, reports that the private media [referring mainly to newspapers] started to flourish since the advent to power of the EPRDF in 1991. Although still in the stage of infancy, the private media have a critical role to play as agenda setters and watchdogs. Therefore, it is of importance to nurture these roles by thoroughly scrutinizing strategy and system of reporting as well as coverage of the private papers.

This research attempts to take a step in assessing the knowledge, attitude and aptitude of the editors, considering their critical role in the newsroom, and their influence on the coverage of food security issues, in selected private newspapers.

1.3.1 Research Questions

The major research questions to be addressed in this study include the following;

- How much do Ethiopian editors know about and relate themselves with food security issues?
- How often do they do stories on food security and why?
- How do editors relate with stakeholders?
- What is the role of the perception of editors on the nature of the issues that get covered or not?

[It is hypothesized in this study that the influence of editors, whether positively or negatively, is caused by their knowledge [or lack of it] of a given issue, in this case, food security issues.]

1.3.2 Significance of the Study

Newspapers' editors play a critical role in newsroom starting from identifying and prioritizing news to conducting investigative and in-depth studies on key issues in the country to inform the public. Utilizing their role, editors can set agenda, based on the need of audience, inform the public, and watchdog on the Government, policy makers, and academic institutions as well as private investments. The significance of this study on the influence of editors on the coverage of food security issues on the private media is that:

- It helps stakeholders to better understand the level of coverage of food security issues in selected newspapers and the reason behind the decision making process that editors undergo and why they pick or drop news;
- It also may shade light on the reasons behind the apparent indifference of some editors to such crucial national issues as food security; whether ignorance has to do anything with it and, in which case, whether stakeholders should come up with means to get the attentions of editors – including through trainings.
- Besides, there exists no research, which assesses editors' contribution and influence on the coverage of food security issues - at least not to the knowledge of this researcher.

Thus, the study is believed to be vital in understanding the underlying causes influencing and guiding editors in food security coverage. The study will also provide recommendations for policy makers by emphasizing the importance of engaging private media in designing food security programs and developing policies.

1.4 Definition of Terms

In order to establish a clear common ground and contextual framework in this study, some frequently used important concepts are defined as follows:

Food Security: The term *food security* originated in international development literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Public interest in global and domestic food security grew rapidly following the world oil crisis and related food crisis of 1972-74. With the African famine of 1984-85, the increase in the number of people looking for food assistance in developed nations, as reported by churches, community centers and soup kitchens, and the growing numbers of food banks in the United States (U.S.) and Canada, the literature on food security grew rapidly. Over time a large number of different definitions have been proposed. There are approximately 200 definitions and 450 indicators of food security (Hoddinott, 1999, Maxwell et al., 1992).

Food security is defined as access by all people at all times to sufficient food to lead an active and healthy life. Food security means that food is available at all times; that all persons have means of access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture (MoARD, 2003).

The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern (FAO, 2006).

Food Insecurity: Is the exact opposite of food security. It is defined as a lack of access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life. Chronic food insecurity refers to the persistence of this situation over time, even in the absence of idiosyncratic or covariate shocks. (MoARD, 2006)

Food insecurity has many causes, but part of the problem derives from a low level of mobility of labor coupled with increasing local pressures on availability of land. A complex combination of factors has resulted in sharply increased levels of vulnerability to food insecurity for a great number of Ethiopians. These factors include: changes in climate leading to more frequent droughts; widespread land degradation; limited income

alternatives and opportunities; increased population pressure; poor market integration; limited access to basic services, inputs, credit and information; technological issues; and issues having to do with national policies and implementation constraints (MoARD, 2003).

The program recognizes that in some localities labor is abundant and is inefficiently used due to shortages of land. People working on these lands are not able consistently to grow enough to feed themselves, owing to decreasing plot size and degradation in soil quality, as well as recurrent drought. At the same time, in other localities within the same regions available land is inefficiently used due to lack of labor on those particular pieces of land. Constraints on changes in use of land and mobility of labor in rural Ethiopia result in persistence of disequilibria in returns to land and labor. Localities experiencing these imbalances may lie within the same regional boundaries (Ibid).

A food security research project conducted in 1995 defines food insecurity in short terms as “lack of access to sufficient food” (Jayne et al., 1995).

Coverage (*In Journalism*): The extent or degree to which something is observed, analyzed, and reported. It is the amount and quality of reporting or analysis given to a particular subject or event¹. (Princeton University, 2003-2008)

Reporting: To make or present an often official, formal, or regular account of (Wekimedia, 2010).

Editing: Editing is the process of selecting and preparing language, images, sound, video, or film through processes of correction, condensation, organization, and other modifications in various media. In a sense, the editing process originates with the idea for the work itself and continues in the relationship between the author and the editor. Editing is, therefore, a practice that includes creative skills, human relations, and a precise set of methods (Ibid).

Editor/Editor-in-chief: The top editor sometimes has the title executive editor or editor-in-chief. This person is generally responsible for the content of the publication. The exception is that newspapers that are large enough usually have a separate editor for the editorials and opinion pages in order to completely separate news reporting and editorial content (Princeton University, 2003-2008, Wikimedia, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The chapter provides literature review of relevant documents and materials for the research project. The chapter is structured in three sections: I) Selected literature on food security and media; II) Ethiopian Media and Food Security; and III) Gate Keeping Theory and Editors' Role.

2.1 Selected Literature on Food Security and Media

“Lucky are the people of Yugoslavia and Somalia as the world’s eyes rest on them. Condemned are the people of Juba for the world is denied access to the town and even does not seem to care anyway. It may be a blessing to die in front of a camera – then at least the world will know about it. But painful to die or be killed, without anybody knowing it.”²

There is nothing strange about the fact that we see some humanitarian emergencies receive more attention than others. Although hunger and malnutrition are equally [if not more] important to conflicts and disasters, they do not receive the kind of media attention the latter do (Sen, 2003). Speaking in a public hearing on ‘The Right to Food³’ in India, Amartya noted that despite the magnitude and intensity of the problem of endemic hunger, it remains on the margins of policy planning, public action and intellectual discourse, not to mention media coverage (Ibid). According to the World Food Programme, hunger and related diseases although claim more lives compared to war and other natural disasters. Many die silently as they live in communities devastated by chronic poverty, without getting media coverage (WFP, 2003).

Thompson (2003) provides three reasons for these mostly unbalanced presentations: media coverage of the emergency; the national interests of the aid donors; and the influence of aid organizations. He defines media coverage as what is often called "the CNN factor". According to Thompson’s “CNN factor” humanitarian emergencies that

² Hand-written letter smuggled out from the besieged Southern Sudanese town of Juba, August 1992.

³ An informal but proactive network of organizations and individuals who believe that everyone has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and under-nutrition

receive extensive publicity most recently like Afghanistan are believed to get more attention and assistance from donors compared to unpublicized and under-reported humanitarian emergencies such as the Congo that receive limited and unsustained response. Basically, as Thomson notes the theory behind the "CNN factor" is that societies and governments attend to the needs they see and hear about. (Ibid)

Grom et. al (2002) also highlight a common perception of our age that media attention is extremely important for achieving political attention, which often contributes to political action and achievement. According to them, the 'CNN-effect is the link between media attention and political action that implies the strategic role the media plays in influencing political leaders' decisions, including Western governments' foreign policy agendas.

The three areas by which Steven (1997) examined the CNN-effect include; an agent of political agenda setting; an obstruction to the achievement of preferred policy goals and plans; and as facilitator or accelerator to policy decision making. According to his findings, the CNN-effect is primarily important in facilitating quick decision in the policy making process, emphasizing/identifying media's role as an accelerator.

Rosenblatt (1996) also argues that the media plays a crucial role in informing the public and instigating action in a very focused and narrow situation such as humanitarian emergencies. Rothberg and Weiss (1996) also concur with the idea that report of media coverage contributes to promote political response and action in humanitarian crisis.

In their article '*The Media and Africa: The Portrayal of Africa in the New York Times 1955-1995*', Schraeder et al note that the media serve an important agenda setting function within the realm of foreign policy. According to them media coverage and reporting assist in achieving presidents and congressional representatives' interest in African continent. (Schraeder et al, 1998)

Ammu (2006) reports incidents when the media have traditionally played an important watchdog role by highlighting instances of death by starvation, sale of children and other symptoms of extreme distress during particularly dangerous periods, thereby convincing the government of the day to pay attention and take action.

Additionally, media's contribution in making differences on the ground can be made clearer by citing an example that Sen (2003) has used. Media's contribution in making a difference on the ground can be seen from the experience of a group of journalists in Andhra Pradesh, who were moved by the troubles of hungry people in the state enough to start a gruel centre in Mahbubnagar district in India. The journalists were initially running it with their own contributions as well as collections from colleagues in various media houses. Soon members of the public came forward to support the effort. In general the example indicates that if the public are notified of what is happening then they become interested enough to respond. It also demonstrates the fact that journalists could be moved like the rest of us – while unlike us they could be propelled to bring to a wider audience the issues that move them.

A more related view was presented by Crow (2000) noting that famine is rare in nations that made it a national or public issue with representation from vulnerable communities. Moreover, Sen (1999) corroborates that free media as part of a democracy plays a large part on famine prevention policies. Citing countries like Botswana and India, Amartya notes that the governments have responded well to famine management and prevention to avoid criticism mainly from a well informed public through the media. (Ibid)

Cate (2002) in his '*CNN Effect is not Clear-Cut*' article includes the very critical role the media plays. According to him the media is strong enough to raise public emotion to the point that it distracts planned interventions. Cate quotes the former Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's speech in which he addressed the CNN as "sixteenth member of the security council". According to the SG "the member states never take action on a problem unless the media take up the case. When the media gets involved, public opinion is aroused. Public emotion is so intense that the United Nation's work is undermined and constructive statesmanship is almost impossible." (Cate, 2002)

The pronounced role the media plays in mobilizing public interest and response is best summarized by the statement Bernard Koucher, former Health Minister of France and the first UN Governor of Kosovo between June 1999 and January 2001 made: "where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian intervention" (Cate, 2002).

On the other hand, many have contested the exaggerated role of the media in achieving political attention and inspiring public interest. According to Cate (2002) many observers

often argue that the perceived power of the press is “not a clear-cut”. He notes that “the relationship between press coverage and humanitarian relief activities is complex and the power of media images to motivate action has been exaggerated”. According to him the influence of the press in facilitating public and government responses to humanitarian emergencies is not as huge as it is widely believed.

Steven (1997) also states that the effect of the media in setting independent agenda is overestimated particularly by politicians. According to him it is the political agenda that guides the media. He provides examples of instances where foreign media provided and/or neglected issues driven by political agenda and/or vested foreign policy interests in a given country. In a broader term, Steven regards the effect as an impediment that restricts governmental freedom of action (forced by the public opinion) and poses as a threat to the operational security of forces. He brings the experience of the 2001/2002 war on terror in Afghanistan where media coverage was limited for the same reason.

Cate (2002) identifies one of the major problems of the press as “it focuses on “news” events, not on issues or slow-developing processes”. He notes that the news particularly of the developing nations is mainly poised of negative stories. According to him the public is often disturbed and pressured with images of famine, destruction and death. Humanitarian crises and their causes are often misrepresented, distorting policymakers’ decisions.

De Wall (2000) also corroborates the limited contribution of the media particularly in avoiding famine. According to him although democratic principles and free press are necessary, they are not sufficient to prevent famine. He adds that the two conditions (democratic principle and free press) are “triggering mechanisms” which will not work unless there is a “political contact” between the government and famine vulnerable-people.

Further, some others like Gorm et al. (2002) conclude that the media plays a crucial role in influencing decision makers only when there are no vital security issues at stake, mainly when a humanitarian crisis occurs in a place of little strategic importance to aid-funding governments.

In general, as Jean (2003) notes that there are some signs of change in the right direction on the coverage of food security issues by media mainly due to a combination of more strategic activism and some journalistic initiative. According to him media coverage of hunger and related issues has considerably increased in early years of 2000, and as to him it is not just because of the drought. He claims that the Right to Food campaign has played a curial role in India in instigating media interest. Jean believes if engaging materials are presented to committed and open-minded journalists, all media will respond positively towards the issue.

2.2 Ethiopian Media Food Security Coverage

As much as the world have been listening to and watching a variety of stories on food security in Ethiopia, the editors in charge of the coverage were not Ethiopians. For decades, the portrayal of Ethiopia in the world's eyes was associated with famine and disaster; the country presented as 'aid dependent', its government as 'obstructionist' and the people characterized as 'lazy'. (Lautze, 2004)

According to Mekuria (2008) Ethiopia's image, after the exposure of the Wollo famine in 1974, during the reign of the Emperor, has been negatively affected as the world saw the disturbing pictures of malnourished children through the international media. The *Derg* regime, as stated by Mekuria, followed the imperial era's negative imaging of the country with 'White and Red Terror' that brutally executed thousands of innocent youth and politicians without trial. (Ibid)

A BBC news crew was the first to document the 1984 famine which reportedly killed over one million people. The international profile of the famine was raised through Western media exposure and the single Live Aid concert in 1985, which assisted in mobilizing international support worth US\$100 million. (BBC, 2010)

It is to be recalled, however, that in early March 2010, the BBC has quoted the statements of an ex-member of the TPLF leadership and, published a report that most of the fund raised for relief purposes was spent on buying weapons instead of the intended plan of feeding those in dire need.

The international media portrayal during the reign of the *Derg* focused on the “cold war”. Schraeder and others report that based on the media’s role, the Regan administration decided to provide humanitarian support to Ethiopia during 1983-1985, despite Marxist ideology of the *Derg* regime. (Peter J. Schraeder et al, 1998) In addition, the American media as discussed by Fair and Chakravarty (1999) associated the 1984-88 Ethiopian famine with “Cold War Frame” debating on how western nations provided humanitarian assistance to a Marxist regime.

The 2002/2003 drought, however, unlike previous disasters did not need vivid pictures of starving children on western television screens to solicit donor support. It kicked off with the Prime Minister’s announcement of the possibility of imminent drought in the late months of 2002 through the international and local media. On top of the Government’s message, high level visitors (heads and deputy heads of UN agencies, the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, numerous ministers, directors and other senior representatives of aid agencies, parliamentarians, and national congressional representatives of donor countries) and press coverage assisted to win the hearts of the public and donors (Government and Humanitarian partners joint steering committee, 2004).

In general, as it is presented by Michira (2002), famine and starvation accompanied by moving pictures of some poor, emaciated and malnourished faces of women and children

from Ethiopia, Somalia, Zimbabwe etc. are the most persistent images of Africa that permeate the Western media. (Ibid)

Mekuria (2008) rightly states that “it is very easy to be branded with a bad image and very hard to readdress and cure the scar.” According to him the famine of 1974 seriously damaged the image of Ethiopia to the point of reducing the country’s name to a synonym to ‘hunger’ and ‘famine’ in dictionaries (Ibid).

As has been demonstrated in the disagreeable Ethiopian image, which the media created by excessive repetition, there is a chance that the media could overdo coverage of issues related to food insecurity. The fact that too much bad news has been reported about Ethiopia may have been influencing the decisions of some editors to ignore news of famine and drought as long as they could. On the other hand, coverage of

2.3 Gate keeping Theory and Editors Role

Gate keeping theory was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1947 and is applied to communication by several social scientists (White, 1950; Gieber, 1964; Bass, 1969; Dimmick, 1974; Schudson, 1997; and Shoemaker, 1996).

Lewin first used the term "gate-keeping" to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which foods end upon the family's dinner table. White later on seized Lewin's comments and turned it solidly toward journalism in 1950, laying the foundation from which most gatekeeper studies in communication are launched. (White, 1964)

In general as stated by Shoemaker et al., gate-keeping theory describes the powerful process through which events are covered by the mass media, explaining “how” and “why” certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention. According to them gate-keeping is one of the media’s central roles in public life as people rely on intermediaries to transform information on many things and issues into a manageable number of media messages. By doing this the gate-keeping process determines which information to use, content and nature of messages. (Shoemaker et al, 2009)

A.Z. Bass in 1996 noted the most important gate-keeping activity occurs within the news organization, involving two states: news gathering and news processing. (Ibid) As presented by White (1964), the gatekeeper’s choices are a complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values. He says “gate-keeping is inevitable and in some circumstances it can be useful”, however, he and several other authors note, gate-keeping can also be dangerous, as it is very subjective and opens doors for abuse of power on deciding stories to use. (Ibid)

In the 1970s’ gate-keeping was upgraded to a newer concept of “agenda-setting”. The researchers found out that the audience learns how much importance to attach to a news item from the emphasis the media place on it. The author in other words emphasized that the role the media has within a society by guiding the weight the audience should provide to a certain topic based on their coverage and focus. (McCombs et al, 1976)

The importance of considering audience when writing news story in the newsroom was strongly emphasized by Kersner (2009). He argues that just because something is interesting to the journalist does not mean that it is interesting to everybody. Kersner recommends picturing and trying to identify audiences' interest. "If your story tells them something new that will affect their lives chances are that you have a good news story." (Ibid)

As described by gate-keeping theory, individuals who decide what will be shown or written about are often referred to as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers determine important news of the day and prioritize the prominence the various stories will receive. Gatekeepers, in this case, 'editors' solely make a subjective decision of what is important and less important based on the agenda of the organization they work for, their own socio economic make up, knowledge, exposure and experience.

The very crucial role that editors play in the journalistic universe is well described by Danner and Pollan saying "editors are the sun". Editors are responsible for making critical yet mysterious and often frustrating work of assigning, editing, packaging and transmission (duration and medium) of a story (Danner and Pollan, 2004). Editors may well be little suns – but they are by no means as irreplaceable as the sun; nor could they defy every source of light as they come out.

By association it is indicated that the editor's role in selecting and rejecting a story is very subjective that is done based on journalist's' experience, attitude and expectations. White corroborates the above statement through his findings saying that editors chose a story that pleases them, mostly news stories that inform them of what is going on in the world.” (White, 1950)

On the other hand, scholars who examined news making process often argue that news is not just something that happens in a void to be reported by journalists, but instead it is something that is created by journalists from a myriad of happenings in and around their world.

A number of scholars including Gans (1979), Harcup (2004) and Yopp et al. (2003), however, argue that audience perspective, organizational mandate as well as circumstances directly influence editors' and reporters' decisions on news reporting. Gans (1979) believes that newsroom top editors, producers and writers usually judge news stories based on the audience's point of view, while reporters tend to judge news story from news sources. Yopp et al. also (2003) emphasizes Gans' idea saying that “journalists must recognize and identify their audience”, basically noting the importance of a journalist asking the question “who cares?” which will come up with a list of groups or audiences that are potential consumers of the message. Harcup (2004) generalizes the notion saying that although the choices that journalists and editors make everyday on stories to cover, sources to consult, questions to ask, contexts and quotes to include are mostly made by the journalist/editors they are “not entirely free choices” that are taken in

a “vacuum”. The outcome of all these is that person of the editor – in the form of interests experience, etc, determines the nature and quality of the media coverage that a given issue gets.

Media coverage is a crucial factor which can not only influence public opinion but also determine the audience size. It can be defined as the way in which a particular piece of information is presented by media either as news, entertainment or as infotainment. Media coverage can affect the extent of information dissemination as well as influence the audience’s opinion while giving out the information. Bad media coverage can ruin the corporate image; it can mar the positive publicity of a political party or even defame a celebrity. On the other hand, positive media coverage can help to create a better image and positive public opinion. Different types of media coverage can be defined based on two important elements – the type of mass media used, and the style of coverage.

Editors and journalists are vested with the power of selecting news stories and crafting the news in a way that influences public opinion and emotion. They are responsible to identify top agenda, inform the public and jointly solicit solutions for improvement.

Hence, to set agenda for the country and the public, and to influence policy makers and private investors, editors should be fully aware of curial issues by seeking collaboration with experts in the field.

However, even to make the first step towards approaching experts in any field, they need to appreciate the significance of the story [or issue] on which a given expert could say a word. And in order to appreciate the significance of such issues as food security and the worth of doing a good story on them, it is for the stakeholders to show the way to the editors by helping them grasp the significance of a given agenda. Because, the decision to cover or not to cover given news as well as the extent of coverage to be accorded a story could be correctly made only when one has a good grasp of the matter. The influence of editors on the content and form of stories is a function what they know about the issue and the depth of their appreciation.

Whether or not the role of the media or that of the editor is exaggerated, the editor and the media could touch the hearts and minds of their audience to the extent of clarity they have over the matter – as well as how they feel about it all.

It has been the hypothesis of this researcher that the editors of the private papers focus more on food security issues pertaining to humanitarian crisis and natural disasters; and that the reason they do not do stories of food security other than crisis is that they have little knowledge of food security policies, programs and issues aimed at the sustainable development of the whole nation or the liberation of households from dependency on food aid. And the literature reviewed in this chapter has, by underscoring the importance of the experience, subjective interest and expectations, among other factors that have to do with what the editors know or do not know, supported the hypothesis, which shall be examined in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

The Study Design

3.1 Research Methodology

A research on the influence of editors on food security coverage requires getting to know the thoughts and insights of the editors, who make the decisions to pick or drop stories dealing with food security. This in turn calls for holding in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. Therefore, the major research methodology is a qualitative method.

On the other hand, the study would also include the stories published in the selected newspapers so that the editors' thoughts and performances could help us better understand their influence on food security coverage. Thus, the quantitative method shall be used to express the extent of food security coverage in the three English weeklies over the research period.

To this end analysis shall be made of all relevant articles including news, features, editorials and interviews related to food security issues. Articles will be identified for consideration if their headlines contained words such as “food security”, “food security programs”, “emergency”, “humanitarian disaster or crisis”, “displacement”, “food shortage”, “drought”, “climate change”, “environment”, “water, livestock etc conditions”, among others.

3.2 Data Sources and Types

Primary data, including interviews with key informants [editors and reporters] and secondary data, including books, reports, newspapers [a total of 60 newspapers] will be used.

3.3 Sampling techniques and Procedures

The subject of this study, which is examining the influence of editors in food security coverage, requires selecting sample editors and the media involved. Coming up with a sample media involved the narrowing down of the media categories.

First, the choice was made between electronic and print media; and then, on the basis of ownership, between the privately owned and the public; and finally, on the basis of the language used, between English and Amharic.

From the first category, print media and its typical representatives, newspapers, were selected for both [accessibility] logistical and conceptual reasons. For, logistically, it is very difficult to receive [get and process] all the programs/shows produced and aired on radio and television. This is even more difficult given the extended dimension that the issue of food security has, encompassing matters including of political, social and economic nature. With so much at stake, it would be hard to get the chance to look into the decision making processes and in to the influence editors could have on food security coverage.

Therefore, the next step would involve making selections from the dozens of Ethiopian newspapers.

3.3.1. Choice of Sample Newspapers

As per the latest information from the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO), there are a total of 58 newspapers, of which 40 are privately owned.

Of these, only those falling to the category of the Ethiopian private press were selected for the study on account of the relatively independent coverage and often critical reportage they offer in contrast with the presses owned by the government. Given the objective of the study, which is looking in to the role of editors in the coverage of food security issues, the relative independence enjoyed by the private press helps us better understand the role of editors. For, where, there is little freedom there is little influence to be exerted.

Again, of the more than 40 private newspapers three English weeklies are chosen for this study. And major reasons have to do with:

- Their wider circulation within the local elite as well as leaders of CSOs/NGOs, international aid and development agencies and members the diplomatic community;
- The identity of the audience mentioned above as most of them are known to be interested in food security/insecurity issues.

- Besides, even the government has recognized in the *A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) -2005/06-2009/10* document the fact that the development partners have a role to play in the effective implementation of the food security program. (MoFED, 2006)

Therefore, the need to focus on the private newspapers that are prepared in the English language and offer stories to the international community as well as considerations of ownership and circulation have led to the selection of the following three English weeklies⁴.

- **The Reporter**: established in 1995 [GC], published by MCC, an English weekly newspapers; Circulation: an estimated 5,500 per week.
- **Capital**: established in 2000 [GC] an English weekly business newspaper published by Crown Publishing plc. with a circulation of 7,000/week.
- **Fortune**, established in 2000 [GC] is privately owned English weekly published by Independent Media that addresses economic and business oriented matters. Circulation⁵: 8,000 week.

⁴ Not that the development partners would not be interested in the rest of the papers written in the Amharic language. However, with one of the most widely read private paper [the Amharic reporter] represented by the English version, ***The Reporter***, the three papers could represent the best that one could get from the private media.

⁵ Data on the circulation of each of the newspapers for the research period was received from the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) and verified by the organizations.

3.3.2. Choice of Editors

Needless to say, all newspapers have editors who define and determine respective content and form. The research selects newspapers because whatever the editors do or the extent of influence they could exert goes only as far as the papers could take them – as far as their readership or their circulation.

However, the interviews need not be limited to the editors of the selected newspapers. This study attempts to assess the influence of editors on the coverage of food security issues by examining their grasp of food security issues as well as the beliefs, dispositions and priorities that affect their decisions in the selection of news stories.

Therefore, the research utilized a non-random, ‘judgmental’ or ‘purposive’ sampling technique - selecting editors of newspapers that cover social, economic and political matters. This is a technique used to ensure diversity and inclusiveness in content. For, including editors working for other Ethiopian papers in the interview would only open more doors for more ideas thoughts from more editors on their shared role; and on what they think of food security issues – and their influences there on.

Accordingly, the editor-in-chiefs and/or deputies of the three English weeklies as well as additional editors and reporters from other English papers (The Daily Monitor and The Sub Saharan Informer) were interviewed.

3.4 Time Frame

The study examines the coverage of food security issues in the selected newspapers within the time frame between January and May 2010. The study used the first quarter of year 2010 as the starting point as the year relatively is considered a good year due to stable food security reports. The Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners Requirement Document for 2010 indicates that the food security situation in the country particularly in the western half of the country is expected to improve in the first half of 2010. The situation has been further assisted by the unseasonal rains that have been received since October 2009 and the timely onset of the *belg* (short rainy season between February to May) in the country that has improved the overall food security conditions. (MoARD, 2010)

The researcher believes that the stated period is conducive to evaluate how the presses dealt with food security issues without having internal pushes (drought/severe food security challenge) and external drives such as other foreign media outlets covering the country's devastating drought, forcing the coverage of food security issues.

Furthermore, as the research period includes the last few months in the run up to the 2010 elections, the study attempts to analyze how the newspapers in question addressed food security issues and whether they examined the government's performance against the achievements in ensuring food security.

3.5 Limitation of the Study

The major limitation is scarcity of good literature to offer critical analysis on the relationship between food security and the media coverage in general; as well as the utter lack of works dealing with the influence of editors particularly on the coverage of food security issues. This has denied the researcher the benefit of other perspectives, which could have lessened the burden and enriched the output of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of Findings and Discussion

This chapter constitutes the essence of the possible contribution this study may have to the area of research on the role of editors in the coverage of food security issues. The first section presents the extent of coverage accorded by the selected newspapers to matters related to food security – including sustainable development and government programs – and/or food insecurity – including hunger and relief efforts.

Under this chapter analysis is made of the first category of samples comprising the contents of 20 editions of each of the three selected sample newspapers: FORTUNE, CAPITAL and THE REPORTER. Secondly, the findings of the in-depth interviews of the editors and reporters of the selected newspapers as well as editors of other papers are analyzed; and the beliefs and perception and knowledge of editors regarding the issue of food security discussed.

First, review of the forms and contents of the newspapers will be presented which will be followed by summary of in-depth interviews as it would be enlightening to look into the actual performance of the journalists before learning about their thoughts and beliefs.

4.1 Coverage of Food Security Issues in Selected Newspapers

The extent of coverage of food security issues in the 20 editions of the three selected English weekly newspapers shall be examined from two perspectives. Firstly, the place or lack of the food security agenda in the overall format of the paper – in the manner of its presentation shall be looked into. Then, the second perspective pertains to the extent to which each of the three newspapers, and each edition thereof has covered the issue – and how often.

The significance of the first perspective is that this researcher assumes the mere devotion of a section/column for the food security agenda in a newspaper means offering 100% coverage, while the absence of such a section significantly reduces the extent of coverage – even despite the appearance of food security stories in a given edition.

4.1.1. Review of Format/Presentation

Columns or sections of newspapers constitute the first indicator of the attention they have set out to devote to a given category of socio-economic, political and cultural issues. Therefore, a look at the sections and columns of the three newspapers will give the context within which the editors contemplate the content of respective papers.

Research question: is there a section/column in the newspapers devoted to food security issues?

Following are the sections under which the papers deal with a variety of issues.

Fortune: No. of sections/columns: 12

Fortune Agenda, Commentary, Quotes, Business news in brief, Interview, OP-ED Notes, News, Viewpoint, View from Arada, Radar, Entertainment, and Leisure.

Capital: No. of sections/columns: 18

Editorial, Local news, In brief, Feature, Commentary, International News, Election⁶, Reader's View, Interview, Environment Focus, Doing Business, Entrepreneur, Business and Economy, Society, Art and Culture, Capital Sport, Quotes, [Jokes, games etc.] & Horoscope.

The Reporter: No. of sections/columns: 12

Editorial, Home News, Business & Economy, Life and Art, Economic Indicators/Highlights, Politics and Law, Interview, Opinion/commentary, Sport, Science and Technology, Global Views, Pan African Perspective.

The newspapers devote several pages to news stories, and a space ranging from 1/8th [20%] of a tabloid page to a full page and sometimes more to each news story or an article in a section/column.

From this perspective none of the newspapers have devoted a section to food security as none of the columns are named as such. Thus, it is not hard to note the fact that none of the papers have considered it worthwhile to devote a column/section especially to food

⁶ This was a section temporary section opened during the research period.

security issues – none of the formats demonstrate a belief that food security issues deserve such treatment.

Nevertheless, food security issues are so wide-ranging that one cannot help dwelling with them directly or indirectly as has been the case in the three newspapers.

4.1.2. Review of Content

The content of every issue of the print media, including the three selected weeklies, is determined by the editors in charge. And the decisions of these editors in its turn are under the influence of their beliefs, value and judgments. The contents of the papers are only details of what is promised in the broad categories – the sections of the newspapers treated herein above. Choice of sections could, thus, mean choice of content at a broader level. It means choosing to cover a given issue 100% of the times.

Research question: to what extent have the selected newspapers covered issues that fall in any of the four categories of food security? In order to answer this question, the researcher first reviewed the overall state of food security coverage in the three newspapers in the research period

The total Number of editions of each paper that appeared within the research period between January 2/3 and May 30 was twenty , of which the number of editions of each paper that came out with food security stories was 10 out of 20, for both Capital and The Reporter, and 7 out of 20 for Fortune.

The total number of food security stories that appeared in each of the three newspapers: 25, 14 and 7 for Capital, The Reporter and Fortune, respectively.

Since neither of the papers devotes a section/column to food security issues, it is evident that the extent of coverage is bound to be less than 100% in all of the selected newspapers. And out of the 20 editions of each of the newspapers, Capital and The Reporter had food security issues included in 10 of them – 50% - while Fortune had only in 7 of its editions – 35%.

4.1.3. Description of the form in which the stories appeared

The 46 stories that appeared in the 27 of the 60 editions of the three newspapers published during the research period were presented either as news stories, as features or commentaries/opinions.

Table 1: Extent of coverage of food security issues in the research period

Selected newspapers	No. of editions reviewed	No. of editions with food security stories	No. of sections devoted to food security	No. of food security stories
Capital	20	10 [50%]	None	25
The Reporter	20	10 [50%]	None	24
Fortune	20	7 [35%]	None	7

4.2 Review of content in light of four aspects of food security

Following are the facts and figures that indicate the extent of coverage of the four major themes of food security [Food Security, Food Insecurity, Sustainable Development and Government Policies] in 20 editions of the three newspapers that appeared in the research period between January and May 2010.

4.2.1 Food Security vs. Food Insecurity

Food security includes sustainable development and government policies/programs aimed at poverty reduction and ensuring food security; where as food insecurity subsumes issues dealing with the situations that are caused by or lead to food insecurity [such as drought, disasters] as well as those related to activities aimed at alleviating the effects such as distribution of food aid and early warning, among others.

While food security pertains to “access by all at all times to sufficient food for an active and healthy life”, food insecurity is related to the unfortunate condition of inability to have and/or create such access – temporarily or persistently [chronically]. Addressing issues of sustainable development, which embraces investments of all sorts, is treating the security side of the issue; while focusing on early warning and food aid distribution, among others, means addressing insecurity and its after effects.

Of the 25 stories that appeared on 10 of the 20 editions of Capital, 10 stories or 40% dealt with Food Insecurity [FI] while 8 dwelt on sustainable development, 3 on Food Security [FI] and the remaining 4 on investment. The Reporter on its part devoted 5 of its 14 stories [35%] to FI, 4 stories to FS, 3 [21%] to stories dealing with government programs and 2 on sustainable development. Fortune newspaper on its part gave 3 of the 7 stories [42%] to FS, another 2 to FI and a story each to sustainable development and government program [on poverty reduction].

4.2.2 Early warning [climate change], drought, appeal and relief

The disheartening reality of food insecurity is announced by appeals for aid, warnings of looming disasters such as drought. These are likely to attract the attention of the press, since there is a sense of urgency involved. The coverage in the three newspapers of these issues in the research period has been 40%, 35% and 28% of the total number of stories [25, 14 and 7] that appeared in Capital, The Reporter and Fortune, respectively.

4.2.3 Government policy, program on food security

In contrast to the news and views related to emergency situations of food insecurity, these issues concern the efforts of the governments to ensure food security at the national, regional and household levels. And for all their importance and long lasting significance, the extent of coverage accorded to these agendas was 11 out of the 25 stories of Capital, 44%; 6 of the 14 stories of The Reporter [42%] and 4 of Fortune's 7 stories [57%].

4.2.4 Sustainable development, good governance and [investment]

Apart from the specific programs designed and implemented by the government, a variety of institutional and policy measures have been introduced by different actors with the view to pave the way for sustainable development. These include local and foreign investments as well as good governance, which are the crucial preconditions for the success of any effort of long-term significance – such as food security.

Capital has devoted 8 stories [32%] to sustainable development and 4 [16%] to investment; The Reporter did 2 stories on sustainable development and 3 on government policies; while Fortune could give only a story to each of the topics.

According to these facts and figures, the extent of coverage of food security issues in the three English weeklies in the research period has been as frequent as 50% of the editions with Capital and The Reporter; and 35% of the times with Fortune. Besides, in the 10 editions of Capital and The Reporter that came out with food security stories, more than one story per edition was found.

The distribution of the stories, which favors issues dealing with the ill-effects of food insecurity over issues of sustainable development, coupled with the nature of the source which the papers often rely upon, seem to be in agreement with the hypothesis of this researcher that the extent of coverage has little to do with the extent of the journalist's knowledge. On the contrary, the extent of coverage which favors food insecurity issues may hint at the utter lack of knowledge on the part of the editors.

The truth of this observation shall become the more apparent in the next section where the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with the editors of the three newspapers as well as others.

Table 2: Review of content in light of four aspects of food security

Selected newspapers	Total no. of Stories	Stories on FI	Stories on FS	Stories on SD	Stories on GP or investment
Capital	25	10[40%]	3 [12%]	8 [35%]	4 [16%]
The Reporter	14	5 [35%]	4 [28%]	2 [14%]	3 [21%]
Fortune	7	2 [28%]	3 [42%]	1 [14%]	4 [57%]

4.3. In-Depth Interview Results and Perceptions of Editors

Through in-depth interviews involving seven editors and reporters from the selected newspapers and from two additional newspapers (The Sub Saharan Informer and The Daily Monitor), the researcher attempted to examine the following;

- How editors understand food security,
- Their level of awareness of its significance in all aspects,
- Their attitude towards it, and
- How they perceive their role with respect to food security.

The results of the interviews are presented in five major thematic categories on the basis of the responses of the interviewees:

1. Newsworthiness of food security issues;
2. The attitude of editors on the issue of food security;
3. The level of awareness of editors about food security;
4. The current state of coverage of food security issues;
5. Limitations of coverage.

4.3.1. Newsworthiness of Food Security Issues

While all of the interviewees agreed that food security is and should be treated as an important national agenda, they all expressed that the agenda does not take center stage as an issue of the day. The editors said that doing news stories on food security is not the order of the day – in contrast to the climate change agenda, which receives a lot of coverage because of its timeliness.

Five out of the seven interviewees said that [ensuring] food security is a process and most of the time it is not such a “newsy agenda”; while the two noted that they make decisions in the newsroom on whether to give priority or not depending on the nature of a particular story.

The respondents had different explanations to offer in support of their belief in the lack of temporality of food security issues. Most agree that the issues have always been with us - with our history; and that we have been talking about the food security agenda for quite a long time. Therefore believe that “people do not want to read about food security at all times”.

That is not the only belief, though. Some editors noted that there is a lot to be said about food security, the issue being “how best to present it to get publics’ interest”. Others even go further to note that they have been trying to address food security issues in different contexts as it subsumes a broad spectrum of issue.

On the other hand, all of the interviewees said that they consider stories of food insecurity including drought, famine and malnutrition newsworthy. And the reason they said is that food insecurity attracts public attention – “people usually listen when there is a problem”. Besides, the long standing relationship the country has had with food insecurity has made it an issue that somehow belongs to the country. In contrast to food security issues, which do not get any “special treatment”; it is when there is food crisis in the country, “when a new famine strikes” that coverage increases as it becomes everyone’s agenda.

4.3.2. Editors’ Attitude on Food Security

Food security is not a favored topic of any of the interviewees. Food security “unfortunately does not happen to be in my favorite topics list”, said one of the interviewee-editors, as if speaking for the group of editors - almost summing up the truth shared by all.

A commonly shared attitude among the interviewees is that food security is considered to be an issue that falls within the government’s responsibility. Besides, they said that since the issue is given a wider coverage by the government media, they do not see the value of giving additional space in the private media. Also, they noted that there are risks involved both in overdoing the coverage of food security and “sounding like the state media”. Still, there were exceptions among few of the respondents who said noted that food security is not an issue that should be left to government alone.

For most of the interviewees the issue is not something that has the interest of urban readers. Thus, they said that the content of the newspaper should follow the market as well as the interest of the majority of the readers, “which reside in the urban areas and are mostly food-secure.”

On the question of the role of the media, in general, and the role of editors, in particular, most of the interviewees said that they do not see how they could help or what they could do to promote food security. The media could do little, they said, unless serious policy reforms are made - mainly policies pertaining to land holding system. Food security is a complex developmental issue; and newspapers have limited role/contribution in it. However, all recognize their role in informing the public - reporting shortfalls or improvements and “exposing” defects pertaining to food insecurity.

4.3.3. Level of Awareness of Editors about Food Security

4.3.3.1 Conceptual Awareness

The knowledge of the respondents on the issue is limited. All the respondents have some awareness of food security issues and their place in Ethiopian history. All raised the 1974 and 1984 famines during the reign of the Emperor and the Derg respectively. Many mentioned the stories of the good old days before the onset of the famines: the times when Ethiopia was considered “the food basket of Africa” and when Ethiopia provided food assistance to South Korea.

While most of the interviews understand what food security⁷ is, their understanding of the concept is tilted towards the negative after effects of failures of food security. It is a common trait shared by all that food security is defined in terms of the concept that signifies the opposite, i.e., food insecurity. For most of the respondents there is little distinction between ‘food security’ and ‘food insecurity’: it is all semantics. The editor in chief of Sub Saharan Informer said that there is a “gray area between food security and food insecurity”.

4.3.3.2 Program Awareness

All of the interviewees said that they do not have comprehensive knowledge of existing food security programs. Of course they are aware of the various food security programs being implemented in the country; they all expressed their familiarity with the names of the programs including the Productive Safety Net Programme (food for work) and Resettlement. However, their knowledge does not extend further: they do know what each project entails.

None of them have read the relevant policy documents (the Food Security policy and the Disaster Risk Management Policy) or implementation manuals including the PASDEP, PSNP and resettlement.

⁷ Food security was defined by some of the respondents from different newspapers: “having sufficient food in the market, and when people do not think about what to eat” [Capital]; “a state of affairs where a nation has enough to consume and guarantees everyone’s access to food” [The Daily Monitor]; and ” the ability to produce food consistently and adequately” [The Reporter].

4.4. Sources of Food Security Reports

All of the respondents said that they mostly have as their sources the reports of government offices (the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), United Nations and International Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Food security issues are mostly covered where the government, NGOs and UN agencies approach the newspaper organizations to cover certain events, program implementations and when press releases of such events reach them.

Some said that they get the opportunity to do stories on food security and related issues whenever there are events including press conferences and the launching of reports by either of the agencies/offices mentioned above. They also follow regular reports that are released by various organizations, particularly, the weekly reports of the United Nations Office for the Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), WFP and the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector monthly reports, which they use as sources. Further, they take account of some actual pointers including the condition of the rains and the presence [or absence] of in local migrants.

All in all, it is quite apparent that they all rely on the outputs of local and international organizations for not just facts and figures but for stories, which they could not come up with unless they have such reports to consult.

4.5. Limitations facing the coverage of food security issues

Financial constraint is a common limitation voiced by all respondents, who said that they do not have designated reporters or contact persons on the payroll to send firsthand reports on for food security. None of the papers ever have trained journalists to do reports on the issue.

Another limitation entertained by a few of the respondents was the potential risks involved in reporting food security issues. While some said that there was nothing to be afraid of in reporting food security issues if the information is based on facts; others admitted that they do not feel that confident to report on food security particularly related to policy issues. They do some self-censorship for fear of harassment by the government, which may accuse them of tarnishing the country's image.

4.6 Discussions

This section contains discussions of the major findings of the study on the coverage of food security issues in private newspapers and the performances of editors thereon in light of the researcher's assumptions as well as hypothesis proposed in earlier chapters.

Firstly, it has been the assumption of this researcher that the devotion of a section/column to food security issues creates the opportunity for coverage 100% of the times. In the three newspapers studies, no such opportunity has been created.

However, even in the absence of a column or section; and, most importantly, despite the perceptions of the editors, which were not in favor of covering food security issues, the three newspapers offered coverage ranging between 35% and 50% of the times/editions.

Therefore, if the editors could cover as much food security issues as they did in the research period, and that despite their lack awareness and favorable attitude, how would they perform if they had enough knowledge and the right attitude?

Secondly, it has been the hypothesis of this researcher that the influence of editors on food security coverage goes to the extent of their knowledge; and that the editors of the private papers focus more on food security issues pertaining to humanitarian crisis and natural disasters; and that the reason they do not do stories of food security other than crisis is that they have little knowledge of food security policies, programs and issues aimed at the sustainable development of nation or the liberation of households from dependency on food aid. In chapter two herein above I have invoked the support I got from the literature reviewed there, which underscored the importance of the experience, subjective interest and expectations, among other factors that have to do with what the editors know or do not know.

Similarly, the extent of coverage of food security issues and the perceptions of the editors as revealed in the in-depth interviews conducted with editors seem to have offered additional support to the substantiation of my hypothesis. For, as could be observed in the results of the in-depth interviews; and as would be apparent in the discussions below,

more than anything lack of a good grasp of the food security agenda has had a major impact in the content of coverage as well as the nature of the editors influence.

As has been revealed by a review of the forms and contents of the newspapers, food security issues have not been accorded with a section/column in any of the three newspapers; nor has the content been chosen or decided upon by the editors. Food security stories of different significance have been published in different sections of the newspapers – including on a column entitled Life and Art, [in The Reporter].

Lack of adequate knowledge is expected to have an important role in the current state of food security coverage; as a result, the stories that appeared on the newspapers are expected to be by and large based on the sources – such as government offices and aid agencies – or written by foreigners. Furthermore, where adequate knowledge is lacking, the role and influence of the editors are diminished to insignificance while the contributions of the offices that release the news gain significance.

Accordingly, given the unanimity of the respondents with regard to

- Their lack of knowledge of the current challenges facing and efforts being exerted to ensure food security as well as the progress in the implementation processes;
- Their shared belief that their readership either has little or no interest;
- Their view that dwelling on food security issues smacks of government-owned-media behavior;

It would be natural to expect these newspapers to come out with little or no story that has anything to do with food security.

However, that is not the case. And the reason has much to do with the same shared lack of knowledge than with anything else: most of the stories on food security that have appeared in the papers were not original stories authored by the editors or their reporters. The stories are usually treated passively and published with little substantive editing. And the reason for the little substantive editing that most of such stories receive is mainly lack of knowledge; while the fact that the stories got published, nevertheless, hints at the passivity [if not indifference] of the attitude of the editors. And, as noted in chapter three, beneath the attitude of passivity or indifference, one is bound to find nothing but ignorance⁸.

4.6.1 Food Security Not a Favored Topic by Editors

The study results indicate that food security gets minimal coverage for a number of reasons among which the belief [shared by most of the editors] that it lacks in temporality and that there is little public interest in it, stand out, according to the respondents. The press tends to scramble for the latest hot topic, always paying attention to what other media are covering (Otsuka, 2008).

In a world where issues of climate change and terrorism take much of the limelight; there may be little surprise that Ethiopian editors find it hard to consider food security among

⁸ In fact, the effect of the shared ignorance on the part of the editors could be apparent in the scarcity of commentaries – save for the few that were written by foreigners [and the reactions of readers, who take the initiative and criticize the comments of the foreigner writer for alleged unfairness or bias.

the important issues of the times. Food security for most editors is just an exhausted topic - particularly in Ethiopia's context - that everyone is tired of reading. According to Otsuka, when the public becomes familiar to the issue media interest drops. (Otsuka, 2008)

The weight editors attach to a certain issue and their attitude towards it affects media content. Media editors largely determine what goes on the media. This is best explained by the gate-keeping theory - in the news selection process, editors' select news stories they believe their audience wants. By deciding what goes into media [newspapers], gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge by presenting certain stories and by discarding others. Moreover, the audience attaches weight to a certain topic based on the emphasis media places on it. Editor's perception of fitness and appropriateness determines news selection and rejection (Okigbo, 1987).

In order to make food security a national agenda, communication and public relations offices of the Government and international NGOs should devise systematic ways to attract editors' interest to cover food security by visualizing and personalizing the issue. Most importantly editors should change their attitude and should stop looking at food security as an issue that belongs only to the government and the victim households – they should recognize that it is everybody's issue.

Editors need to reclaim their role in informing the public about the status of food security in the country through regular reporting and should watchdog the government by

following up progresses and investigating failures in the implementation of programs as well as policies. As Kilman (2006) clearly indicates, food insecurities occur if nobody challenges and criticizes policy decisions, government actions/inactions or corrupt practices that lead to crop failures and food shortages.

4.6.2 Lack of Editors Awareness About Food Security

As indicated in earlier discussions editors do not have a comprehensive understanding of food security and ongoing programs in the country. The significance of the role of newspapers in food security is unambiguous. As Kilman (2006) notes, newspapers play a vital role in spreading knowledge and information; thereby contributing to food security. However, the newspapers cannot be expected to make such key contributions as long as their editors are not well informed enough about the food security situation.

Editors and reporters need to improve and widen their knowledge to understand the broader aspects of food security. Food security is not about failure of crops. Editors need to understand that the occurrence of crop failures is not independent of public policy - and the implementation of programs of irrigation and agricultural research, among others. Failure of crops affects not only food supply but also destroys employment opportunities and various means of livelihood survival. Further, Sen (1989) argues that a drought/famine triggered by failure of crops can be averted by a careful policy of redistribution - including that of employment creation.

4.6.3 Resource Constraint

A strong financial base is crucial for the private newspapers to effectively carry out their roles both as the disseminators of information and as watchdogs of governmental activities. As Kilman (2006) indicates a free and independent newspaper can serve the ideal guide and watchdog governments and givers of aid, but for newspapers to be truly free, independent and proactive, newspapers must be economically sound. And newspapers cannot be financially sound enough to contribute their best unless they stand on a sound financial footing supported by a critical mass of readers and advertisers.

Moreover, the relationship of media [newspapers] and the government needs to improve. As Sen (1989) explains, a free press and the practice of democracy contribute greatly to bringing out information that can have enormous impact on policies for food security, including information about the early effects of droughts and floods as well as about the nature and impact of unemployment. (Ibid)

4.6.4 Limited Sources of Food Security Stories

As the findings of this study indicate, most of the editors wait for organizations (governmental and non-governmental) to approach them with stories for publication, while they are supposed to be proactive enough to get involved. As a rule, editors should be committed to actively search for sources and broaden their network to ensure access to accurate, timely and comprehensive information. However, the whole task cannot be left to the editors. Organizations that provide information have to have an open door policy to newspapers and should package the information in such a way that it stands very

attractive and accessible to editors/reporters. According to Reuters Tip Sheet, organizations need to be active to provide editors with first hand information and need to also hold events to help reporters and editors get a grasp of the subject matter (Reuters, 2010).

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendation

In today's world newspapers have formidable powers to inform the public on issues that have formerly enjoyed little or no attention. Food security is not and has not been a popular topic; it has not received nearly as much coverage as have political and economical issues not to mention scandals and terror stories. However, if and when newspapers persistently cover stories related to say, food security, the public gets more informed; and thus more interested enough to stimulate the government to work harder to achieve food security.

Various reports indicate that food security can be achieved only after it has attained the stage of becoming everyone's agenda. Thus, newspapers have a key role to play in alerting the government and the public on emerging issues. In some situations media [newspapers] have triggered practical assistance when other channels of communication and lobbying have failed. Newspaper coverage ensures access to the wider public and key policy makers to raise awareness and gain support and funding for implementation of programs.

Thus, the duty of newspapers and editors is to serve the public with respect, skill, vigor and courage without being influenced by private interests. Editors must be pioneers in setting agenda and aggressive in publishing news. Editors have to give first priority to present detailed coverage of local issues and events. Although food insecurities are news, they are not all of the news. Newspapers should be generous in coverage of achievements and progresses as well. Editors must be pioneers in redirecting public and external interest. Newspapers must attain excellence through balance, fairness and authority of their reporting, and through that they should inspire all including the government and the public as well as investors to do more and better.

This research concludes by stating that food security issues need to be back on the top table of newspapers; and editors need to pick up the stories while the concerned offices should work harder to ensure that editors have a clear grasp of the agenda. Food security is not something that can be achieved overnight with mere existence of policies on papers and dramatic speeches; and it is not something to be left to the government alone, either.

Nevertheless, a close examination of influential private media newspapers and in-depth interviews with editors/deputy editors and reporters reveal that the limited knowledge that editors have on food security issues, their attitude towards it (their belief that food security is a hackneyed topic and not the order of the day) as well as the financial limitations that they have to live with influence their decisions – hence, the contents of the papers. Thus, due to these major factors, private newspapers have failed to play their

crucial role to make food security a “national agenda” and its reporting part of the “order of the day”.

Given the major findings of the study that

- Editors do not seem to consider food security as a “national agenda” and most definitely they do not consider its reporting to be the appropriate for the times;
- Food security is regarded solely as the responsibility of the government with its coverage belonging mostly – if not limited to – the state media.
- Editors have limited knowledge about food security and very little awareness - if at all - about ongoing food security programs.
- Food security becomes “newsworthy” when there is food insecurity namely drought, famine and malnutrition.
- Above all, there is a clear lack of awareness among editors regarding their role with regard to the food security agenda;

The researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

For Newspaper Editors:

- Editors should play their critical role in the society by informing and setting agenda, and playing watchdogs on government activities and policies with the view to ensure that the issue is back in the “national agenda”.
- Editors should be aware of the status of food security situation and the ongoing major food security programs in the country.

- The newspapers should designate a section/column to food security and should be committed to assign staff reporters to report food security.
- Editors should be proactive to find resources that allow them to cover food security issues.
- Editors should be active enough to create networks with governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure timely information sharing and comprehensive coverage of food security.

For Policy Makers and Government Organizations:

- The Government should honor its commitment to ensure food security by involving all stakeholders; thus, it should realize the role of the media, especially private newspapers, in informing the public and agenda-setting by factoring in their contribution and responsibility in the formulation of policies and implementation of programs.
- The government should also commend and/or hold accountable newspapers for carrying out and/or failing to play their role in food security.
- The government should demonstrate similar degree of commitment to food security as it provided to climate change in recent year and provide [quality] a high-level leadership with the view to stir public interest in the issue.
- Government should ensure open door policy and should be committed to educate [periodically inform] the media regarding progresses attained as well as challenges facing ongoing programs.

Humanitarian Partners and Development Agents

- Humanitarian partners and development agents should build on professional training programs to educate reporters, columnists and editors on food security reporting including techniques and pointers to attract the public as well as domestic and international investments.
- They also should take a step to compensate the shortfalls of the editors by offering regular reports in a manner easily comprehensible of the journalist.

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ANNEX

Annex I

Interview with Editors of Private Newspapers

- Research question: How much do Ethiopian editors know about and relate themselves with food security issues?
 1. How do you understand the concepts of food security and food insecurity?
 2. How do you define food security?
 3. How significant do you think is the issue of food security in Ethiopia?
 4. What aspect of food security do you find most newsworthy, and why?
- Research question: How often do they do stories on food security and why?
 5. Have you ever done a story on food security on your newspaper over the first five months in 2010?
 6. Do you think you have given enough coverage to the issue or do you have reservations? If you have reservations, please discuss.
- How do editors relate with stakeholders?
 7. Where do you get stories on food security most of the time? The government, International Organization, foreign media?
 8. Has any organization (government, NGO and others) ever approached you with a proposal to have a story done on food security?
 9. Have you ever called on any organization with the intent to cover food security? If yes why and when?
 10. If you were to do a story food security [or assign a reporter there on] do you know where to go to get information?

11. How do you relate yourself to food security? Who do you think are the stakeholders of food security in Ethiopia besides the victims? Do you consider yourself a stakeholder of food security issues? If yes, in what sense?
- Research question: What is the role of the perception of editors on the nature of the issues that get covered or not?
12. Are there any reasons why you think newspapers might not want to cover/ cover food security issues? If yes, could you state the reasons?
13. As an editor do you think or feel to have some special role in the treatment of food security issues? To set agenda setting role and watchdog role? (If yes explain... discuss? If no explain why ..?)
14. As an editor, do you have favorite issues/topics that you would love to do stories on? Does food security fall within your favored topics? If yes, why? If food security issues are not among your favorites, could you explain why not?

Annex II

List of Interviewees

Name	Position	Newspaper Organization
Solomon Bekele	Editor in Chief	Capital
Binyam Tamene	Reporter	Capital
Alemayheu Seyefeselassie	Editor in Chief	The Reporter
Biruh Yehunebelay	Deputy Editor in Chief	The Reporter
Omer Redi	Editor in Chief From May 2008 to July 2009)	Fortune
Biruk Girum	Editor in Chief	The Daily Monitor
Samson Haileyesus	Editor in Chief	The Sub Saharan Informer