

# Reporting on Good Governance and Human Rights

## 1. Good Governance

Although there is no single definition for good governance, there exist a significance consensus that good governance is the political and the institutional process whereby institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee realization Human Rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption with due regard to the rule of law.

*“Governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.*

*Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable. And it promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources.” – Governance for Sustainable Human Development, A UNDP policy paper UNDP 1997*

Good Governance is said to encompass the elements to achieve sustainable development, which includes: respect of Human Rights, rule of law, political pluralism, multi-actor partnerships, transparency and accountability, access to information, and social, cultural, economic and political empowerment of people for effective public participation.

## 2. Key elements of good governance

As the perception of Good Governance varies among organizations, the elements that constitute Good Governance also vary according to organizational perception and experience.

The Resolution 2000/64 of the Commission on Human Rights and the above mentioned report, Governance for Sustainable Human Development, acknowledges the following as core characteristics of good governance.

### 2.1. Participation

Effective public participation in decision making is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other.

### 2.2. Rule of law

Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced by an impartial regulatory body, for the full protection of stakeholders. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities.

### **2.3. Transparency**

Transparency means information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by governance policies and practices, as well as the outcomes resulting therefrom. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided through the media and in easily understandable form.

### **2.4. Responsiveness**

Good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

### **2.5. Consensus orientation**

Mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved

### **2.6. Equity**

All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

### **2.7. Effectiveness and efficiency**

Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

### **2.8. Accountability**

Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders

## **3. Good Governance and Human Rights**

Good Governance and Human Rights are mutually reinforcing and goes hand in hand. Without good governance, human rights cannot be respected and protected in a sustainable manner while Human rights principles provide a set of values to guide the work of governments and other political and social actors.

Resolution 2000/64 of the Commission on Human Rights states that: *The Commission of Human Rights "Recognizes that transparent, responsible, accountable and participatory government, responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, is the foundation on which good governance rests, and that such a foundation is a sine qua non for the promotion of human rights"*

Without good governance, human rights cannot be respected and protected in a sustainable manner as the implementation of human rights relies on a conducive and enabling environment. This includes appropriate legal frameworks and institutions as well as political, managerial and administrative processes responsible for responding to the rights and needs of the population.

*“There is no doubt that nurturing good governance is essential to ensuring respect for human rights. Without the rule of law, independent courts and other institutions of the modern society - essential components of good governance - the promise of human rights may remain just that: a promise unfulfilled. Enforcement of fundamental freedoms when it matters may be impossible. The lesson of history is that transparent, responsible, accountable and participatory governance is a prerequisite to enduring respect for human dignity and the defence of human rights.”* - The Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG, "Human Rights - Essential for Good Governance", Seminar on Good Governance for the Protection of Human Rights held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, 15 September 2004

Good governance promotes human rights in a number of ways. It encourages public participation in government, inclusion in law-making and policymaking, and accountability of elected and appointed officials. It enables civil society to become actively involved in policymaking and leads to the wide representation of societal interests in decision-making. In this manner, disadvantaged groups, including women and minorities, are empowered to defend their rights.

#### **4. Good Governance, Human Rights and Media**

*“Free media are the source and root of a living civil society, and a critical and watchful civil society is becoming a factor of paramount importance for good governance”* - HansJürgen Beerfeltz, State Secretary of Germany’s Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

As freedom of expression is a tool for keeping the public informed and holding governments accountable, a free and independent media is a requirement for good governance and protection of human rights.

The Constitution provides full guarantees for freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Article 27: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and the freedom to communicate opinions and expression in a manner that is not contrary to any tenet of Islam”*

Article 28: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of the press, and other means of communication, including the right to espouse, disseminate and publish news, information, views and ideas. No person shall be compelled to disclose the source of any information that is espoused, disseminated or published by that person.”*

Hence, access to information and a strong independent media, where when journalists are free to investigate, comment, criticize the policies and actions, is essential for Good Governance to thrive.

#### **5. Freedom of Expression - a Right to protect Rights**

Protection of press freedom is extremely important to ensure effective Good Governance and protection of Human Rights. Protecting press freedom is not just about protecting the rights of media and media personnel but protecting the right of the public to receive the information needed to make informed decisions.

The Maldives Broadcasting Commission and Maldives Media Council are two institutions legally empowered to protect press freedom in the Maldives.

Outlining its very purpose, Article 2 (a) of the Broadcasting Act states that the purpose of the Act is to: *“uphold and encourage the right to freedom of expression stated in the Constitution of the Maldives”*

In Maldives Media Council Act, Article 10 (a) (b) and (c) under the Responsibilities of the Council, states that it’s a responsibility of the Council to:

*“Foster and develop the freedoms of expression and dissemination of information provided in law; and raise awareness on those freedoms;*

*Resolve issues related to actions of the government, the media and others that restrict freedom of expression and the freedom to seek and accept information, by bringing the issues to the attention of the responsible authorities;*

*Identify political, legal and economic measures that hinder freedom of providing information and the freedom of the public to be aware of issues, study those measures and take corrective action through the relevant government agencies”*

Any restriction on Press Freedom hinders the right of the public to be informed and the process of creating fresh public opinion falters. Only a public that is informed can make intelligent decisions.

Until and unless people are fully informed about activities of the state, no one can look forward to a responsible and accountable government. In brief, without freedom of speech and expression, and democratization of the mass media, people’s rights cannot be protected.

## **6. The key roles of media in contributing to Good Governance**

Press freedom is prerequisite to make the state mechanisms responsible and accountable towards people. The media plays a leading role in creating fair public opinion, and is one of the most powerful means to put across people’s problems, desires and aspirations to the government. The key roles that media plays in contributing to Good Governance are:

**A Watchdog:** The most important function of the media being the “Watchdog” promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny.

**A Gate Keeper/Public Forum:**

Media should serve as a public forum by bringing together a plurality of diverse interests, viewpoints, public concerns and voices into the open by providing a platform for discussion. This role of Media keeps the citizens empowered and informed about policies and actions, thus keeping political leaders responsive, as well as educating citizens to facilitate rational debate and informed public opinion

**An agenda-setter:**

Media has an equally important to play in raising awareness of social problems, informing elected officials about public concerns and needs, thereby, strengthening government responsiveness for instance to social problems and to exclusion. Media plays an important role where it highlights vital issues such as any major disasters, conflicts, or humanitarian crises that require urgent action by national governments or the international community.

## 7. Reporting on Good Governance and Human Rights

Reporting on Good Governance and Human Rights is not only reporting or exposing failures and large scale abuses; it's more about how public policies are implemented or how people are treated in everyday life or in broader terms it's about the life that goes around us.

Human Rights and Good Governance has a direct impact on the progress and development of the country. Hence, Journalists should apply human rights and good governance agenda in their news items and reports to ensure that public stays informed of what is going on around them.

Media being producers of information for the general public, decide what to cover and what issues or aspects of a story to highlight. By making these decisions, media have power over what we know and do not know about human rights.

By expanding media coverage to include reports on human rights and Good Governance, people will be better informed about their rights and the rights of others thereby increasing public's sense of security that Human Rights abuses will not be ignored by media.

## 8. Rights based approach to Journalism

Media do not just provide information and reports on news events and current issues, but through decision-making play a crucial role in influencing how people think and what people consider normal and acceptable.

The kinds of decisions that have an impact include selection of types of news stories, choice of words and language, choice of people to interview, pictures to illustrate stories and story placement in newspapers and radio and television news and feature programs. These decisions all send messages to audiences.

### 8.1. News Elements

Elements of News are qualities that make information newsworthy. The process of writing a Human Rights and Good Governance story falls within the traditional fundamentals of news gathering skills.

To be newsworthy, the story must have some or all of the following values:

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| <b>Proximity:</b>  | If the event is happening close by, it will have a greater impact on your readers  |
| <b>Timeliness:</b> | If something is happening NOW, it has more impact on the reader. The most recent development in a story can be used as a feature   |
| <b>Prominence:</b> | If the people in the story are well known, the story will have more impact on the reader. Most people are not as impacted if the story involves people they do not know. |
| <b>Conflict:</b>   | Readers are interested in rivalries, arguments, fights, and disagreements.   |
| <b>Novelty:</b>    | If something is unusual, original, or unique, readers want to know what it is and why it happened.   |

**Human Interest:** If the story evokes (inspires) emotion in the reader such as anger, sadness, or happiness, the reader will have a greater connection with the story and the story will have a greater impact.

## 8.2. Journalism Values

All news organizations have their own list of values along with codes of practice. The values of journalism guide journalists in exercising their power, and protect the public. They are intended to guarantee good journalism.

**Responsibility** The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time.

**Press Freedom** Freedom of the press belongs to the people. It must be defended against encroachment or assault from any quarter, public or private.

**Independence** Journalists must avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety as well as any conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict. They should neither accept anything nor pursue any activity that might compromise or seem to compromise their integrity.

**Truth and Accuracy** Good faith with the reader is the foundation of good journalism. Every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias and in context, and that all sides are presented fairly. Editorials, analytical articles and commentary should be held to the same standards of accuracy with respect to facts as news reports. Significant errors of fact, as well as errors of omission, should be corrected promptly and prominently.

**Impartiality** To be impartial does not require the press to be unquestioning or to refrain from editorial expression. Sound practice, however, demands a clear distinction for the reader between news reports and opinion. Articles that contain opinion or personal interpretation should be clearly identified.

**Fair Play** Journalists should respect the rights of people involved in the news, observe the common standards of decency and stand accountable to the public for the fairness and accuracy of their news reports. Persons publicly accused should be given the earliest opportunity to respond. Pledges of confidentiality to news sources must be honored at all costs, and therefore should not be given lightly. Unless there is clear and pressing need to maintain confidences, sources of information should be identified.

## 9. Guidelines on Human Rights based reporting

Journalists have a moral obligation to promote human rights all the time and in every story because media are “watchdogs” whose role is to bark loudly to warn people about threats to their freedom, to their security, to their livelihoods and to their culture.

Good journalism dies where human rights are weak. Journalists and their families — like everyone else — also need to live free from fear of oppression and exploitation; access to buildings if they are disabled; equality if they are women. Therefore they have a responsibility to expose abuses and to raise awareness about human rights. Human rights are the basis of all good journalism.

Points to consider in human rights approach to reporting:-

- The audience will often be unaware about the idea of human rights and what it means so Journalists need to explain which right is at stake is and how people can protect themselves from abuses.
- Always report human rights stories with the concept of “Human Rights” at the forefront of the story—people must learn about their rights and the rights of others from you.
- Any action or actions that contravene Constitutional protections of human rights, is against the Constitution—which is unacceptable. Remind your audience of the Constitutional responsibilities.
- When adopting human rights based approach to journalism always consider disadvantaged groups and how they may be impacted by the issue that you are reporting on.
- When you are sourcing data and facts about an issue where possible, use disaggregated data. This would include data disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status, age, disability etc.
- When writing a story about a particular group of disadvantaged people, while being mindful of their current and future safety, it is important that their opinions and voices are heard on the issue. A human rights-based approach encourages participation and empowerment. These groups could provide information not only on the situation but also provide interesting solutions to some of the issues that they face.
- Where it does not pose a security threat to those involved, ensure that those interviewed are comfortable to come to you with further information. Where relevant also provide them with information on how to contact journalists that are sensitive to their human rights issues, so that if an issue should arise they are able to go directly to a journalist who will be to support them to make the public aware of the issue.

## **9.1. Guidelines on Rights based Interviewing**

Interviewing is the one of the most basic - and often the most intimidating - tasks in journalism. Interviews can provide the elements that are vital to any news story, including basic factual information, perspective and context on the topic being discussed and direct quotes. To start, do as much research as you can and prepare a list of questions to ask. Once the interview starts, try to establish a rapport with your source and keep the conversation on track.

Points to consider in human rights approach to interviewing:-

- When interviewing using human rights based approach always be aware of possible power inequalities.
- When reporting on human rights issues make sure that hard, indisputable facts are collected prior to reporting.

- Before attending the interview make sure exactly what is that the Journalist wants to know and what is going to be reported. Also it is important to be clear on how the issue will be reported and how the information from the interview will be referenced. Make it clear from the interviewee how he or she prefers to be quoted.
- Always be sensitive to the cultural, political and social context and subject matter.
- When interviewing always consider the safety and security of the person being interviewed. If they are likely to be threatened or subjected to any violence as a result of the interview, ensure that interview is done at a safe place and that their identities remain anonymous when reporting about the issue. Protecting the interviewee is not only about journalist integrity but is also a human rights issue.

## 9.2. Interviewing Human Rights Victims

It is always important to be well prepared before interviewing victims of Human Rights abuse. Conduct research beforehand about the individual's case and find background information to acquire some understanding of the details of the story. Each case is different.

- Do not interview anyone who is hysterical or in shock; rather, interview a friend or family member, and go back to the victim later.
- If the interviewer cannot be a person of the same sex, make sure that the victim is comfortable talking with someone of the opposite sex.
- Be sympathetic, but keep it short. The Journalist most likely doesn't know how they are feeling.
- Tell the victim the purpose of the interview. Ensure they understand that information obtain from them will be published or broadcasted.
- Explain what on the record and off the record mean. Tell the interviewee to use that phrase at any time during the interview.
- Check the interviewee's comfort with the length of the interview. Also, is the interviewee comfortable with the venue? Is s/he happy for you to use cameras or other recording equipment?
- If interviewing at a hospital, try to get permission from the hospital authorities before the interview.
- Start with an open-ended question to give the survivor the opportunity to steer the conversation with that with which she or he is comfortable.
- Take breaks for rest or recompose if necessary for either party.
- Interviewing victims can be difficult and traumatic. Seek help or counselling if you are feeling emotionally affected by the experience.