

Investigative journalism: A South-South Dialog

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and its partners, the Swiss Embassy in Brasília, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), the Attorney General of the Republic (PRG) and the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI), invited to the international workshop on 22nd of November. The event took place in the auditorium of the PRG in São Paulo.

Issues and proposals

Journalists face a number of threats and risks in their day-to-day work. Government actions fail in many parts of the world to ensure the legal framework necessary to protect journalists. Governance structures tend to threaten freedom of expression if adequate coordination between the Judiciary, Executive and Legislative branches is lacking. Sensitive issues, such as corruption, violence and mismanagement of public resources, are not adequately covered by the media in many contexts due to the above issues.

Additionally, and as a result of the difficulties faced by investigative journalists, an accurate and responsible coverage of the challenges faced by vulnerable population groups is quite exceptional in our developing world. The media tends to depict poverty and the poor in a dehumanizing way. Coverage seems to place poverty as a hope-

less condition. Social policies that are playing a significant role in improving people's well-being do not receive the adequate reporting.

Objectives

The aim of the workshop was therefore to provide a platform for discussion and learn about the status quo of the media in different countries as well as possibilities and threats that journalists have to face in the investigation work. The workshop provided an opportunity for a critical analysis of the governance structures required to ensure freedom of expression and guarantee legal protection for journalists. It enabled media agents to highlight and discuss - under a comparative perspective - the challenges they face daily in exercising their profession and duties. Sensitive issues, such as press freedom and governments' transparency and accountability, were on the agenda. A special focus was put on the strengthening of the South-South Dialog.

Speakers

In the first place the discussion was led between various highly respected journalists from different parts of the world, under these Ritu Sarin from "The Indian Express" - Chief of Investigative Bureau, Claudio Tognolli from the journal "Consultor Jurídico", César Tralli from TV Globo, Sanjuana Martinez, journalist from the Mexican

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– “La Jornada”, Makhudu Sefara, editor of the South African “The Sunday Independent”, Abderrahim Foukara from Al Jazeera Channel in Washington DC and Luis Nassif of the “Agência Dinheiro Vivo” among others. Furthermore other key actors of the civil society and the state like Ophir Cavalcante, president of the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB) or Jorge Chediek, representing the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) participated in the event. Switzerland was represented by two journalists. Lukas Hässig contributed by a report on his experiences on investigative journalism in Switzerland, especially in the banking sector involved in the last financial crises and his difficulties on publications about the issue. Patrice Schneider, in addition, presented the Fund “Media Development Loan Fund”, a mission-driven investment fund for independent news outlets in countries with a history of media oppression. The funds aim is to make media organs economically sustainable and therefore independent from other sources that might have interests in influencing their work.

Different experiences

During the event various issues were discussed and the wide differences between the situations of investigative journalists in different societies became strongly evident. Sanjuana Martinz from Mexico reported great difficulties in her investigative work that involves in big parts clerics accused of child abuse. Besides defamation or legal actions against her work, she also reported physical threats against journalists in Mexico. In contrast Ritu Sarin described a totally different scenario. In India the law “Right to Information Act” (RIA) guarantees any citizen to obtain information from a “public authority” which is required to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. Therefore the investigation process is not just strengthened by the state itself, but also reflects a culture of public information. A third speaker, João Paulo Charleaux from the newspaper “Estado de São Paulo” related his experiences in Haiti and criticized the handling of journalists and their possi-

bilities to investigate in the country. Often the journalists were confronted with difficulties in the covering of incidents, especially when they were related to the Brazilian army in a negative way. To conclude he emphasized that, on his point of view, the realization of the workshop was essential, because the Brazilian media was still lacking in self-reflection.

The partners

As an essential partner the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung was happy on counting with the PGR. Not only the interpretation but also the transport service for the speakers and organizers were sponsored by the institution. The facilities were offered by the Interior Ministry. Additionally the IPC-IG and the UNDP in general and the ABRAJI contributed enormously in the organization of the event. The Swiss Embassy in Brasília had a special involvement, which also contributed through the financing of various issues. The cooperation was extremely successful and satisfying and will find continuation in other projects in 2011.

Audience

The target group of the event was composed by journalists in key positions, representatives of governments and representatives of the organized civil society that have a common interest in further developing investigative journalism. The PGR was represented by 14 attorneys, which had arrived from all over the country. The seminar was attended by 75 participants, which consisted mostly of active journalists. The frame of the event made it possible for the participants to raise questions and to make comments about the presentations of the speakers. The audience showed a very high degree of preparation, which made the discussion extremely focused and of high quality.

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Future networking

At the end of the event the speakers, as well as the audience, asked for a continuation of the dialog and suggested a second meeting in 2011. So far the participants had the chance to share very distinguished experiences and connect to other professionals, tackle the same problems or exchange ideas and networking possibilities with each other.

Resume

Unanimously the participants certified the event as a big success. The topics "Investigative Journalism" and "Freedom of speech" are on top of the agenda for discussion not only in Brazil. The reflection about the media in different countries created a framework for comparison and showed possibilities to improve the environment for investigation and the publication of the results.