

Journalists' Level of Accountability in Tracking Developmental Projects in Edo State

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Abstract:

This research examines the level of accountability among journalists in Edo State, Nigeria, in monitoring developmental projects, emphasizing media's role in fostering transparency, accountability, and public engagement. It investigates the capacity of journalists to uphold these functions despite challenges such as limited access to information, external influences, and pressures from government and political actors. Through a mixed-method approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research explored the effectiveness of media accountability in promoting societal development and the strategies employed by journalists to engage the public in the developmental process. Findings indicate that media accountability is crucial for project transparency, yet journalists in Edo State often face constraints, including restricted information access and political intimidation. The study emphasizes the need to domesticate the Freedom of Information Act in Edo State to enable journalists to track developmental projects effectively. Recommendations include implementing stronger regulations to protect journalistic integrity and encouraging collaboration among journalists, civil society organizations, and government entities to enhance transparency and accountability.

Keywords:

Media accountability; Developmental Journalism; Freedom of Information Act; Journalistic Ethics.

I. Introduction

In society, the media plays a critical role between the leaders and the people. The functions of the media encompass educating, entertaining, surveillance and cultural transmission. Surveillance refers to the media's role in gathering and disseminating information about significant events, including the progress of developmental projects. The media is primarily saddled with the responsibilities of informing, educating, and entertaining. However, the mainstream media stimulates people's aspirations and activities in the direction of accomplishing societal developmental goals by advocating such objectives. Hence, Yar'Adua, Msughter & Garba (2023) assert that the media have evolved into a ubiquitous tool of contemporary life. It is therefore expected of the media to elucidate, enlighten, and educate the public on important matters impacting the welfare and advancement of society.

Journalism is the primary act or process carried out by a journalist. A journalist is someone who obtains and compiles information – text, audio, or image – transforms it into a form that is worthy of publication, and then distributes it to the public. The journalist has a responsibility to give voice to those who have not been heard (Rodriguez, 2008 cited in Walters, 2011), promotes transparency and demands explanations and responses for choices that influence the public (Salveron, 2024). The ability of journalists to carry this task conscientiously implies accountability in performance of their role in the society. Thus accountability denotes responsibility in fulfilling the roles of enlightening, educating,

entertaining, and surveillance function. This level of accountability promotes societal growth and development (Msughter et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2022).

Development does not just happen. It is the product of careful planning and following through on set objectives by those responsible to implement such project – leaders and those in authority. Achieving development requires concerted efforts. Hence, in 2015 the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs with seventeen key objectives for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). In order to achieve the vision of the SDGs, it is pertinent for countries, states within countries and local governments to work assiduously by utilising available resources for projects that will improve the lots of the people. Therefore, it behooves journalists, as critical stakeholders to help in achieving these goals by monitoring the implementation of projects meant to bring about development in a society (Aondover et al., 2022; Aondover et al., 2022).

As nations globally focus on sustainable development goals, the media's scrutiny of developmental projects become a linchpin for ensuring transparency, accountability, and the effective utilization of public resources. Journalists are expected to hold public officials accountable by tracking the progress of projects that they initiated and reporting on their successes and failures.

This research examines the growing concern about the level of accountability on the part of journalists in fulfilling their roles effectively. It delves into the intricacies of the Edo State journalists' level of accountability in tracking developmental projects, exploring the multifaceted dimensions that influence the effectiveness of this role (Yar'Adua et al., 2023).

Anand (2014) examined the importance of development journalism in a developing country like India, assessed the role of development journalism as a facilitator of positive change and highlighted innovative development programmes that deserve media attention and potential replication across the country. Ordinarily, journalists should adequately report on abandoned projects and bring them to the forefront of public discourse as part of their agenda-setting role and social responsibility. This approach could elicit action from the government and ensure that developmental projects are completed in a timely manner. However, reporting on and tracking these projects requires specialised skills, including investigative techniques, and the patience, tenacity, and persistence needed to follow stories from inception to completion (Aondover et al., 2023).

In today's digital world of information overload where attention easily shifts to other things, the journalists' role in directing focus to developmental projects cannot be overemphasized. Their role in promoting transparency and accountability in governance is critical for the growth of any society. However, concerns have been raised about the extent of journalists' accountability in tracking developmental projects. Issues such as misinformation, biased reporting, and the influence of external factors on journalistic independence pose challenges to the effectiveness of the media's oversight function. This research sought to address these concerns by investigating the level of accountability exhibited by journalists in the context of tracking developmental projects. The queries this research ascertained were, to what extent are journalists effective in their level of accountability in tracking developmental projects in Edo State? What role does media accountability play in influencing the success or failure of developmental projects in Edo State? What strategies do journalists employ to enhance public awareness and participation in developmental processes in Edo State? What

factors determine journalists' ethical stance while reporting on developmental projects in Edo State?

Although other researchers have investigated the role of development journalism in driving transformation in a society, this article seeks to increase the body of knowledge through the application of Social Responsibility theory and Development Media theory. Social Responsibility theory was introduced by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm in their 1956 publication, "Four Theories of the Press." Social responsibility theorists advocated for the press to prioritize the public interest above personal gain, emphasizing the importance of providing public access to information (Aondover et al., 2021). This perspective asserts that the press must supply information to political leaders while prioritizing the public good over party loyalty, remaining impartial yet principled, and actively advocating for communal welfare. By analyzing journalists' reports through the framework of social responsibility theory, the researcher aims to determine whether journalists conduct themselves ethically, covering developmental issues objectively and free from bias, without succumbing to government influence that might dilute their reporting.

Development media theory specifically addresses the function of communication in advancing social and economic development, especially in developing regions or countries grappling with diverse challenges. Applying the Development Media theory in this research will help evaluate the proficiency and impact of journalists in reporting on projects intended to foster development. This include economic advancement, infrastructure enhancement, and other endeavours aimed at elevating the quality of life for the general public.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Accountability in Journalism

Accountability in journalism refers to the ethical and professional obligation of journalists to deliver precise, impartial, and openly accessible information to the public. This responsibility includes ensuring that individuals, groups, and institutions are held accountable for their actions and decisions (Aondover, 2019). Accountability-focused journalism aims to uncover wrongdoing, corruption, and the abuse of power by organizations and public officials. Various scholars have explored the components that define "accountability in journalism."

McQuail (2003, p. 19), as cited by Fengler (2019), emphasizes that accountable communication requires authors (originators, sources, or gatekeepers) to take responsibility for the quality and consequences of their work, ensuring alignment with the needs of audiences and stakeholders while addressing societal expectations (Msughter et al., 2023). Journalists hold the vital responsibility of disseminating accurate and unbiased information to the public, acting as a crucial link between the government, development agencies, and citizens. Salveron (2024, p. 5) elaborates on the functions of journalists in society, stating that:

When journalism shines a light on the workings of governments, businesses, and other organizations, it encourages ethical conduct and deterrence of malpractice by the knowledge that scrutiny is ever-present and when institutionalized, create a transparent society. Accountability is no longer an afterthought but a deeply ingrained principle in the workings of all power structures.

A critical aspect of journalists' responsibility to society is tracking developmental projects. By monitoring progress from inception to completion, journalists enable societal advancement. To perform this vital role effectively, accountability is essential.

Accountability simply refers to answerability. Newton, Hodges, & Keith (2004) assert that journalists have a responsibility to respond to various stakeholders, including society at large, audience members, subjects, sources, and potentially their employers and the journalism profession (Msughter & Aondover, 2023). Supporting this viewpoint, Aikulola (2021) cites Professor Ogwezzy-Ndisika, a member of the Editorial Board of The Guardian Newspapers in Nigeria, who stated:

We have to focus and expose what government and corporations are trying to hide. Accountability must not only be on government but individuals and corporations. Accountability is at the heart of our work, and we have to pursue it vigorously.

Accountability has become increasingly important due to the public's interest in the mass media's role in promoting democracy and the quality of information they provide (Hile et al., 2023). Therefore, journalists must uphold a strong sense of accountability to their audience, ensuring accurate reporting without compromising their integrity to please government leaders or those in authority.

2.2 Journalist Role in Government Accountability

Pritchard (2000, p. 2), as cited in Bardoel & D'haenens (2004), defines media accountability as the expectation or obligation for media organizations to report their activities to their constituents. He emphasizes that the core of this accountability process involves "naming, blaming, and claiming." Thus, journalists have a mandate to report on all government activities that affect the public (Vitalis et al., 2023). Meeting this obligation is essential for keeping individuals informed about significant developments at local, state, or federal levels.

Journalists must resist intimidation and obstruction while fulfilling their societal duties. Their critical role requires diligently pursuing accurate information, adhering to legal safeguards, and scrutinizing developmental projects in Edo State. This includes evaluating resource allocation, assessing project progress and impact, and reporting any discrepancies to the public. This responsibility is particularly crucial given that, despite the Freedom of Information Act, some states, including Edo (Okereke, 2020), have yet to adopt it more than a decade after its enactment by former President Goodluck Jonathan. As a result, Nigerian journalists face governmental repression due to the non-implementation of this Act, jeopardizing their safety and freedom of expression. Consequently, access to vital information becomes difficult, obstructing transparency and public governance accountability (Akinselure, 2023).

2.3 Development Journalism

Anand (2014) views development journalism as a crucial branch of journalism focused on socio-economic issues often neglected by mainstream media. Its purpose is to highlight these matters and seek solutions that promote growth and development. This form of journalism aims to instigate sustainable and positive transformations across various domains, including social, behavioural, political, moral, economic, and environmental aspects. By facilitating the translation of information into actionable initiatives, development journalism contributes to enhancing the quality of life. It addresses issues such as rural-urban imbalances, promotes equitable information dissemination, and tackles challenges like poverty by exposing

their underlying causes and consequences (Idris & Msughter, 2022). Ultimately, this approach fosters development, particularly in rural areas (Singh & Bharti, 2021; Uchenna, Obi, & Egere, 2021).

The term “developmental project” refers to initiatives undertaken by the government aimed at improving the living standards of the population. These projects are designed to foster economic, social, and infrastructural advancement within a region, playing a crucial role in enhancing the well-being and livelihoods of its inhabitants. They influence vital aspects such as job opportunities, access to essential services, and overall quality of life.

While journalists must cover all newsworthy stories, special emphasis should be placed on developmental projects. By utilizing development communication techniques, known as development journalism, journalists highlight the significance of these initiatives and foster public engagement and accountability, ensuring they receive the necessary scrutiny and support for success (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019).

To effectively cover developmental projects, journalists must extend their focus beyond metropolitan areas and engage in collecting community reports while addressing the concerns and needs of local residents. Editors should refrain from downplaying these stories, even when faced with an abundance of political or commercial news, as emphasized by Anand (2014). Anand asserts that journalists serve as the eyes and ears of the people, urging them to tackle challenging questions, comprehend the issues, and seek accurate answers from those in power (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a).

2.4 Challenges of Development Reporting

Media accountability is a constitutional requirement as the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), Chapter II, Section 22. States: “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.”

However, the reality in practice contradicts this ideal. Journalists in Nigeria face significant challenges in providing accurate, fair, and transparent information, particularly in a developing country. As a result, achieving accountability journalism remains elusive due to the power held by government officials, including the president, governors, and influential figures. Economic coercion also serves as a major obstacle, hindering journalists from effectively fulfilling their duties (Mojaye & Msughter, 2022).

For instance, in the build up to the 2023 General Election, a former Nigerian aviation minister Femi Fani-Kayode verbally assaulted journalist Eyo Charles from the Daily Trust Newspapers, criticizing him for daring to inquire about the funding of his travels across Nigeria. Fani-Kayode labeled the reporter as “stupid” and implied he would report him to his employers (SaharaTV, 2020); a hint at potential repercussions that could jeopardize the journalist's employment and livelihood. Such incidents may deter journalists from pursuing stories that require holding influential public figures accountable. Beyond job security, the threat to personal safety is an even more severe challenge (Obasi & Msughter, 2023). In Nigeria, journalists investigating developmental projects risk harassment, intimidation, or even physical violence from government officials or their agents. Security forces have been known to confiscate newspapers, close media establishments, or target journalists attempting to expose corruption or mismanagement (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024b).

Umar Audu, a journalist with the Daily Nigeria newspaper, conducted an undercover investigation and acquired both the transcript and certificate from the Ecole Supérieure de Gestion et de Technologies in Cotonou, Benin Republic, in a remarkably short six-week period (Audu, 2023). Shortly after the publication of his report, the President of the National Association of Nigerian Students in Benin Republic, Ugochukwu Favour, demanded his arrest for exposing corruption within the Nigeria Immigration Service ("Fake Certificates: NANS President Demands Arrest of Undercover Reporter," 2024). In an interview, the journalist, Umar Audu, expressed concerns about his safety ("Fake Degree: I'm Worried over My Safety, Says Undercover Journalist," 2024). Such dangers create a chilling effect, discouraging thorough and objective reporting on developmental projects.

2.5 Empirical Review

Uchenna, Obi & Egere (2021) investigated the role of development journalism in driving rural transformation in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. Their research aimed to evaluate how mass media can be utilised to advance development, particularly in Nigeria's rural regions, within the framework of Development Media Theory. They utilised a conceptual and analytical approach, including a thorough examination of existing literature on development journalism in Nigeria to analyse the current state and propose solutions. Their study emphasised the necessity of effective and multifaceted information systems for rural development in Nigeria, highlighting sectors such as health, education, the economy, social and cultural aspects, as well as basic amenities like electricity, roads, and water. Despite the significant potential of both local and national media outlets, their findings indicated a lack of effective dissemination of development-oriented journalism to drive rural transformation in Nigeria. The research recommended that mass media, at both local and national levels, prioritise coverage of rural development issues and devise strategies to overcome challenges in reaching rural areas. They advocated for a strategic emphasis on development-oriented journalism and stressed the importance of media engagement in rural areas to facilitate rapid rural transformation in Nigeria.

Recognizing the importance of grassroots development, the researchers directed their attention toward rural communities in Ebonyi state. Nonetheless, they omitted any discussion of potential challenges media outlets encounter in promoting development-oriented journalism to facilitate rural transformation in Nigeria. This ongoing research aims to investigate this aspect overlooked by their study.

Jamil (2019) in a research titled "Increasing accountability using data journalism: challenges for the Pakistani journalists" sought to know how journalists can utilize data journalism to hold leaders accountable, particularly in authoritarian regimes with limited information access. Employing qualitative methods such as document review and face-to-face interviews, the research aimed to understand Pakistani journalists' capacity for data journalism and the challenges they confront in its implementation. The findings highlighted both the practice of data journalism in Pakistan and the obstacles journalists encounter. The researcher suggested improving the effectiveness and accessibility of data journalism as a means of accountability in media organizations operating within restricted information environments.

Jamil (2019) focused his research on the significance of data journalism in monitoring accountability and transparency among public office holders. However, this current project shifts the focus to interviewing journalists who handle the data, exploring their methods for accessing data to inform their reporting.

Yar'Adua, Msughter & Garba (2023) in their research, Media and National Development in Democratic Societies, sought to know the role of the media in national development, focusing on development communication and reporting, while emphasizing the importance of advocating for societal development. Their study adopted the theoretical frameworks of Development Media Theory and Agenda-setting Theory to analyze the media's impact on national development. Through secondary source of data including journal articles, textbooks, and internet sources, the paper explored the imperative nature of development news reporting and the media's role in fostering societal progress. Their key finding underscores the dual role of the media, which can either enhance or hinder national development efforts. The study concluded by reiterating the objective of development communication, emphasizing the media's responsibility in advocating for societal development. The recommendations given included advocating for socially responsible media practices aimed at fostering national development, with a focus on implementing developmental goals through a bottom-to-top approach.

Their study relied on secondary source of data without engaging in surveys or interviews with active or experienced journalists. This research aims to address these gaps by evaluating the accountability demonstrated by journalists in Edo regarding their coverage of developmental projects.

III. Research Methods

The researcher adopted a mixed method approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to determine the Journalist Level of Accountability in Tracking Developmental Projects in Edo State. The premise underlying the effectiveness of the mixed research design is that the counterbalancing qualities of one strategy will offset the weaknesses of the other. Quantitative data were obtained by survey design; specifically, questionnaire was administered to respondents. Sobowale (2008, p. 27) defines a survey as an approach involving “drawing up a set of questions on various subjects or on various aspects of a subject to which selected members of a population are requested to react.” Interviews were used to obtain qualitative data which afforded the researcher the opportunity to probe deeply into the subject matter.

The distribution of journalists according to their various chapels is shown in the table below:

Table 1: (above) shows the distribution of the sample size across the entire chapel in the NUJ, Edo state Council

Name of Chapel	Males	Females	Total
Africa Independent Television (AIT)	01	04	05
Bronze FM	11	11	22
Correspondents'	16	02	18
Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS)	17	15	32
Federal Information	02	07	09
Federated	10	06	16
Independent Television (ITV)	22	08	30
KU FM/ Speed FM	05	04	09
Merit	10	06	16
Nigerian Observer	15	10	25
Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)	08	07	15
Reliance Chapel	08	03	11

State Information	20	19	39
Super FM	05	04	09
Vibes FM	03	02	05
Grand Total	153	108	261

Given that accredited journalists as recognised by Nigeria Union of Journalists, Edo state council are 261, the census sampling method was used by the researcher. Census sampling is often used in situations where the population under study is small or manageable, making it feasible to collect data from every member. In a census sampling, data are collected on the entire population, hence the sample size is equal to the population size (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo, & Okpanachi, 2022).

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 261 journalists were sent the questionnaire using Google form. 252 or 96.6% responded while 9 persons or 3.6% did not. Of the journalists sampled, 112, representing 44.5% were male and the remaining 140 or 55.6% were female. This distribution had no impact as coverage of developmental stories is not deemed gender sensitive.

Table 2: Respondents' Work Experience

Years of Service	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 3	21	8.3
4 – 8	21	8.3
9 – 15	140	55.6
16 >	70	27.8
Total	252	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data in Table 2 shows that majority of the journalists, about 210, are seasoned practitioners with more than a decade experience in the profession. It is expected therefore that their long years of experience is an advantage to the research under investigation.

Table 3: Mean Score Analysis of Journalists' Level of Accountability in Tracking Developmental Projects in Edo State

SN	Statements	(5) SA	(4) A	(3) N	(2) D	(1) SD	Total	Mean Score	Decision
1.	Media accountability is crucial in ensuring transparency and success of projects	98	112	07	28	07	252	4.06	Accepted
2.	Media accountability encourages government action towards developmental projects	91	126	14	21	00	252	4.14	Accepted
3.	Social media makes information gathering on developmental projects easier	70	126	07	35	14	252	3.81	Accepted
4.	Journalists engage with public to raise awareness on developmental projects	70	161	14	00	07	252	4.14	Accepted
5.	Journalists use various platforms to disseminate information on developmental projects	133	112	07	00	00	252	4.50	Accepted

6.	Obtaining accurate information on developmental projects is challenging	42	112	35	42	21	252	3.44	Accepted
7.	Journalists face obstacles in accessing government officials for information	56	119	21	49	07	252	3.67	Accepted
8.	Influence of external factors on journalists' ability to report accurately	49	133	07	42	21	252	3.58	Accepted
9.	Journalists prioritise objectivity and impartiality in their coverage of developmental projects, regardless of external influences	07	105	56	77	07	252	3.11	Rejected

The maximum cut-off point on the 0 – 5 range on the Likert Scale is 3.0. Therefore, responses whose mean score ranked higher than 3.0 were “accepted” while those that fell below 3.0 were “rejected.”

3.2 Interview Data Presentation

To validate responses garnered from the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with four seasoned journalist that have covered developmental projects. Two work with radio station, one with print medium and the last with a television station. For easy reference, the respondents are identified as R-1, R-2, P, and T respectively.

3.3 What has been your experience in following up on a developmental project after flag-off?

Responses from the respondents suggested that there is huge gap between what the government states at project inauguration and actualisation. The journalists noted some developmental projects are “flagged-off” during electioneering to keep the people expectant.

Respondent R-2 said government authorities are economical with details of awarded projects, Respondent T maintained it was difficult getting contractors to speak on project progress, money they were paid and such details. Respondent P insists that the experience has been time wasting, scarce information that could lead to misinformation of the public if used and bring the media organisation to disrepute.

3.4 Have you reported on project failure after its inauguration and what action was taken?

The responses varied from one journalist to the other. Respondent R-1 stated that such reports were either labelled as “sponsored by the opposition” or the reporter sanctioned using his or her medium; in other cases, gratification could be offered to kill the story.

Respondent R-2 had no experience while Respondent T said in some cases, following such reports, contractors were mobilised back to site while in others, and no action was taken despite series of update.

According to Respondent P:

I made an attempt on about two projects which failed after inauguration but the outcome was rather frustrating and my career was threatened because I work for a government media. The threat came from my boss who was also directed that the

story be dropped. This is despite my efforts in following the story for about three to four months.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Discussion

a. RQ1: What role does media accountability play in influencing the success or failure of developmental projects in Edo State?

The researcher used items 1 and 2 in Table 3 to answer this research question. 98 respondents 'strongly agree' while 112 'agree' that media accountability is crucial in ensuring transparency and success of projects. Seven (7) journalists remained 'neutral' while a total of 35 respondents either 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. The statement as tested was "accepted" with a mean score of 4.06. This shows that when the public ascertain that the journalist is not doing a PR job for the government of the day, the public is more likely to be favourably disposed to such medium. In the interview conducted, Respondent R-2 pointed out that when there is adequate media coverage, it increases public awareness and participation, elicit public interest and helps to uncover fraud or reduce possibility for corruption.

Uchenna, Obi & Egere (2021) in their research established that no country can have meaningful development when the rural communities are not developed. They go further to state that development can only be effective when relevant and diverse information are accessible to rural residents. This means therefore that media accountability is pivotal to the success or otherwise of development in a society. McQuail (cited by Uchenna, Obi & Egere, 2021) explained, using the Development Media Theory that the media must engage in positive development tasks and give priority to contents that promote development. However, from the data gathered, it suggest that Edo journalists are unable to fully fulfill this responsibility. This is due to limitation in accessing credible information that will make them accountable to their audiences.

b. Research Question 2: What strategies do journalists employ to enhance public awareness and participation in developmental processes in Edo State?

Items 3, 4, 5, and 6 show Edo journalists actively engage members of the public to raise awareness on developmental projects with 245 respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' to spreading information on development projects through various platforms in order to have public buy-in and create awareness. This encourages participation by benefitting communities.

Respondent T noted that as watchdogs of society, when the media consistently focuses on the development need of a community, gets contribution from community members, it is likely to arouse government response. This is in line with the Social Responsibility Theory. McQuail (2010) as cited by Antai & Umoren (2023) notes that the media have to be beholden to the society in which they operate and are obligated to perform their duties impartially, truthfully and accurately. Hence, to perform this function, Edo journalists rely on different platforms to disseminate information about developmental projects. This include newspapers, radio, television and online platforms.

c. Research Question 3: What factors influence journalists in Edo State from maintaining ethical standards in their reporting on developmental projects?

Out of the all the journalists sampled, item 8 on Table 3 shows a total of 182 respondents or almost three-quarter of them are positive that external pressures such as government, contractors and political interference, could compromise the ethical standing of a journalist. The information on item 9 reveals that while journalists strive to be objective,

external pressures exist and have an effect on reportage of developmental projects. Therefore, while majority of the respondents agree that ethical guidelines provide guidance to journalists to report on developmental projects, the reality from item 9 as well as the oral interview indicated that the external pressure and the survival instinct of self-preservation and job security overrides ethical considerations.

For instance, Respondent R-1 stated that when reports of projects failure are done, government will either tag it as opposition sponsored, witch hunt the reporter through the leadership of the medium they work or offer outright gratification to “kill the story.” Respondent P was threatened by the head of the department about possible loss of job as the respondent works in a state owned media organisation. The responses show that the prevailing external pressures is not encouraging for in-depth coverage of developmental projects. Yar’Adua, Msughter & Garba (2023) noted that to support development, media personnel need the right environment in terms of freedom, capacities and checks and balances to function. However, with influence of external pressures, Edo journalists do not have the right environment to effectively report on such projects and drive development.

V. Conclusion

Based on the research data, it was established that media accountability is key to ensuring transparency and success of developmental projects. Notably, it encourages government to take action. However, access to information that will enable journalists effectively track these projects is lacking because the Freedom of Information Act has not been domesticated in the state. As such, journalists have had to devise other means to get relevant information and monitor such projects. Some have used social media and other platforms to distribute information in order to elicit public participation in development projects.

Notwithstanding, journalist remain susceptible to external influences such as intimidation, threat to job security and life which could compromise their objectivity and impartiality. The researcher noted that effectively track developmental projects, all stakeholders including government, journalist, members of the benefiting public, all need to collaborate and be transparent. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of accountability among Edo State journalists is low because the aforementioned serves as a limitation in tracking developmental projects.

In the light of the study’s findings, the researcher recommends that the Freedom of Information Act should be domesticated in Edo State to enable journalist access information without restriction. Media organisations and the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ Edo State Council should enforce stricter regulation and oversight mechanisms to ensure media accountability and prevent external pressures from compromising journalistic ethics. Furthermore, should be active collaboration among journalists, civil society organisations, and government agencies for better tracking of developmental projects.

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