Constructive Journalism across Social Welfare Domains: Comparing Housing, Scholarship, Healthcare, and Emergency Assistance Programs

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Abstract: This article examines how constructive journalism can be applied across four social welfare domains: housing assistance, scholarships, healthcare access, and emergency assistance. Using a selective conceptual review, verified Vietnamese policy documents, and illustrative local news reports, it assesses six dimensions: problem definition, evidence about responses, beneficiary voice, access information, ethical risk, and follow-up. The domain-based comparison shows that all four domains require structural context, independent verification, dignified representation of beneficiaries, transparent discussion of limitations, and reporting after initial publication. Their operational priorities nevertheless differ. Housing coverage must explain long-term causes and avoid stigma. Scholarship coverage should clarify eligibility, deadlines, and administrative barriers. Healthcare journalism requires a high verification standard and careful communication of uncertainty. Emergency assistance reporting must prioritize speed, safety, and immediately usable information. Based on these findings, the article proposes a five-step constructive social welfare reporting model for provincial converged newspaper, radio, television, and digital news organizations in the Mekong Delta. The model combines a verified welfare-information database, cross-platform production, beneficiary-sensitive sourcing, response evaluation, and a follow-up system that tracks both access and program outcomes. The model is a conceptual proposal that requires testing in provincial newsrooms.

Keywords: constructive journalism; social welfare; local journalism; Mekong Delta; public-service communication

1. Introduction

Social welfare reporting is often produced when a household has already reached a point of difficulty. A family needs safe housing, a student may leave school because of costs, a patient cannot reach appropriate care, or a community requires urgent support after a storm or flood. These stories make hardship visible and can connect citizens with public programs, charities, professional services, and community support. Yet coverage often narrows the issue to an individual case, donation ceremony, or institutional activity. It may attract attention without explaining causes, access, limitations, or lasting results.

Constructive journalism offers a useful approach to this problem. It does not replace critical reporting with favourable news. Rather, it retains verification, independence, and scrutiny while extending attention from failure and conflict to credible responses, future possibilities, diverse perspectives, and public participation [1, 2, 3]. Related work on solutions journalism places particular emphasis on reporting the response to a social problem, examining evidence of effectiveness, explaining the mechanism, and stating limitations [4]. These principles are relevant to social welfare because audiences need more than emotional recognition. They need information that helps them understand systems, judge claims, locate services, and hold responsible organizations accountable.

Constructive and solutions-oriented stories can improve positive affect, perceived efficacy, engagement, and, in some settings, credibility or trust [5, 6, 7, 8]. Systematic reviews nevertheless show more consistent effects on emotion than on comprehension, trust,

or behaviour [9, 10]. A welfare story is not effective merely because it is hopeful or widely shared; it must also be accurate, useful, fair, and supportive of informed action.

The need for a domain-sensitive approach is especially clear in the Mekong Delta. The region faces overlapping economic, demographic, and environmental pressures. Recent analysis describes livelihood vulnerability, uneven human-capital development, migration, and growing exposure to climate-related shocks [11]. Vietnam's climate-development assessment also identifies the Delta as a major area of risk requiring resilient development and coordinated action [12]. These conditions create continuing demand for reporting on housing, educational support, healthcare, and emergency assistance. Provincial converged news organizations can combine print, radio, television, and digital channels when communicating these needs. Whether their institutional relationships constrain critical reporting is an empirical question that cannot be resolved from the international literature alone. Published provincial news items nevertheless provide useful, limited illustrations of existing coverage [13, 14].

This article therefore asks: How should constructive journalism be adapted across housing, scholarship, healthcare, and emergency assistance programs, and what reporting model is suitable for provincial converged newsrooms in the Mekong Delta? The article treats social welfare broadly. It includes state social assistance, public services, scholarships, charitable programs, media-supported humanitarian initiatives, and emergency relief, provided that the activity addresses a defined social need. The contribution is a comparative framework that identifies shared standards while preserving the operational and ethical differences among the four domains.

The four domains were chosen because they represent recurring forms of welfare reporting with different evidence standards, time horizons, beneficiary risks, and access decisions. Housing, scholarships, and healthcare refer mainly to program or service areas, whereas emergency assistance is a response situation that may involve all three. They are therefore analytical reporting contexts rather than mutually exclusive categories. Employment, livelihoods, disability, and older-age support remain relevant but fall beyond this focused comparison.

2. Research Method

This study is a selective conceptual and comparative review, not a systematic review or meta-analysis. It draws on peer-reviewed research about constructive and solutions journalism and domain-specific communication, along with Vietnamese legal and policy texts, international reports, and publicly accessible local news items. Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to journalism standards, welfare access, operational risks, or the Mekong Delta context. Preference was given to publications from 2020 to October 2026, with earlier theoretical studies retained where necessary. Materials lacking an identifiable author or institutional publisher, publication details, or a verifiable original source were not used for additional contextual claims. The search was iterative and thematic; no comprehensive database search, fixed screening population, or PRISMA study flow was undertaken.

The comparison was organized in two stages. First, conceptual studies were read to identify shared reporting standards, including structural explanation, response verification, beneficiary participation, practical access information, ethical safeguards, and follow-up. Second, source-derived observations were grouped into six pre-specified dimensions for each domain: (1) problem definition, (2) evidence about the response, (3) beneficiary voice, (4) access information, (5) ethical risk, and (6) follow-up. The resulting matrix in Table 1 is an interpretive synthesis, not a set of coded frequency results. Official policy documents were used to identify applicable Vietnamese program contexts. The selected provincial news reports are documented illustrations rather than a representative content-analysis sample; they

cannot establish newsroom staffing, editorial decision-making, audience effects, or program outcomes. The five-step model is consequently a proposition for future field assessment.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Constructive journalism as a social welfare reporting framework

Constructive journalism is sometimes mistaken for positive storytelling. In welfare reporting, it instead asks whether a story offers a fuller and more usable account of a problem. Hermans and Gyldensted [15] identify elements such as solution orientation, future orientation, depolarization, and engagement with the public. McIntyre and Lough [4] similarly argue that solutions journalism should examine a response, show evidence, explain how it works, and acknowledge limitations. These features preserve the watchdog role because a response is not accepted at face value. It becomes another object of investigation.

Vietnamese scholarship also emphasizes a move from simply announcing welfare policies toward explaining entitlements, access barriers, and implementation, while retaining public scrutiny [16]. This provides a domestic conceptual point of comparison, but it does not constitute empirical evidence that provincial newsrooms already use the proposed five-step workflow.

For welfare coverage, the first requirement is structural context. A person's immediate need may be visible, but the conditions producing that need are often less visible. Housing insecurity may involve income, land, rental markets, disability, environmental exposure, or administrative status. Scholarship access may depend on family resources, information gaps, application complexity, school support, and expectations about higher education. Healthcare access may be shaped by distance, cost, referral systems, health literacy, and workforce capacity. Emergency need may reflect both the hazard and earlier patterns of vulnerability. A constructive story connects the individual case to these wider conditions without reducing the person to a symbol of suffering.

The second requirement is response verification. Welfare stories commonly report that an agency, business, charity, or media organization has provided support. The existence of an activity, however, is not evidence that it is sufficient, equitable, timely, or sustainable. Journalists should distinguish inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Money allocated, houses started, scholarships awarded, medical visits delivered, or relief packages distributed are inputs and outputs. Safer living conditions, continued study, improved health access, or restored household stability are outcomes. Constructive journalism becomes weak when it reports only the ceremonial stage.

The third requirement is dignified and plural sourcing. Beneficiaries should appear as people with knowledge, preferences, and rights, not only as grateful recipients. Welfare news often relies on officials and service organizations while people experiencing the problem are absent or narrowly quoted [17, 18]. Their participation must be voluntary and informed, without requiring humiliating disclosure in return for attention or assistance.

The fourth requirement is practical access information. A story has greater service value when it explains who is eligible, where to apply, what documents are needed, what deadlines apply, what costs remain, and where complaints or questions can be directed. Such information must be verified and dated because programs change. It should also be presented in formats suited to local audiences, including audio, short video, mobile graphics, accessible text, and hotline information. Constructive reporting thus joins explanation with navigation, but it must avoid becoming promotional communication for one provider.

Finally, follow-up tests promises, identifies exclusion, corrects information, and shows whether a response continues after attention declines. Repeated exposure matters to longer-term effects of constructive news [19], while continuity distinguishes journalism from a one-

day appeal. The question is not only whether help was delivered, but whether it reduced the problem, for whom, and under what conditions.

3.2. Comparison across four social welfare domains

The four contexts share broad constructive reporting standards but differ in their operational requirements. Table 1 compares all six analytical dimensions across the four contexts. The cells specify questions a newsroom should verify rather than measured differences in current journalistic practice.

Table 1. Six-dimensional comparison of constructive social welfare reporting

Comparison dimension	**Housing assistance**	**Scholarship support**	**Healthcare access**	**Emergency assistance**
Problem definition	Structural insecurity: unsafe site, tenure, household costs, and climate exposure	Financial and procedural barriers to entering or continuing education	Obstacles to appropriate, affordable, timely care; referral and insurance arrangements	Immediate hazard and unmet basic needs, linked to prior vulnerability and recovery
Evidence about responses	Eligibility and allocation records; construction safety, tenure, financing, and occupancy evidence	Published criteria, applicant selection, disbursement records, renewal and persistence data	Clinical and service evidence checked with qualified sources; cost, capacity, and uncertainty	Time-stamped confirmation of needs, authorized providers, delivery records, and coverage gaps
Beneficiary voice	Residents assess location, safety, costs, and suitability; no compulsory gratitude	Successful, unsuccessful, and non-applicants, including minors with added safeguards	Patients and carers may describe access barriers; clinical claims need independent checking	Affected households explain urgent priorities and later recovery without coercive interviews
Access information	Who qualifies; legal documents; site and design conditions; application and contact routes	Eligibility, application forms, dates, award value, renewal, appeals, and advice	Insurance entitlements, referral routes, service location, cost and verified contacts	Safe routes, shelters, official aid channels, verified collection details and last-update time
Ethical risk	Poverty stigma; unsafe disclosure of homes; relocation into another hazard	Exposure of family circumstances; identification of children; conflicts involving donors	Privacy and health misinformation; overstated treatment benefits; delays in care	Trauma, physical danger, fraud, disclosure of vulnerable locations, outdated instructions

Comparison dimension	Housing assistance	Scholarship support	Healthcare access	Emergency assistance
Follow-up	Occupancy, repair quality, household expenditure, tenure and safety over time	Receipt of support, application completion, retention, renewal and equitable selection	Actual service access, delays, residual costs, quality concerns and corrections	Delivery gaps, unresolved complaints, resettlement, schools, health and livelihoods after relief

3.2.1. Housing assistance

Housing stories often begin with visible material conditions: an unsafe structure, overcrowding, flood damage, or a family without stable accommodation. This visibility makes housing suitable for strong visual journalism, but it also creates a risk of episodic framing. A damaged house can dominate the story while income insecurity, land status, infrastructure, health needs, and environmental risk remain unexamined. Reviews of safety-net coverage have found recurring emphasis on individual cases and political conflict rather than structural causes and policy design [17]. Australian research also shows that media representations can welcome responses to homelessness while still limiting discussion of deeper conditions and long-term adequacy [20].

In Viet Nam, Decision No. 539/QD-TTg established the 2025 national campaign to eliminate makeshift and dilapidated housing [21]. A Vĩnh Long news report documented the local completion announcement and reported numbers of houses built or repaired [13]. These are verifiable records of an announcement and reported outputs; they do not, by themselves, demonstrate long-term occupancy, construction quality, or household security.

A constructive housing story should examine the response as a complete living arrangement, not only a physical building. Reporters should ask who selected the beneficiary, which criteria were used, who owns the land, whether the house is safe for children, older people, or persons with disabilities, and whether water, sanitation, transport, schools, healthcare, and employment are reachable. In climate-exposed areas, location and design should be assessed against flood, erosion, heat, and storm risks. A newly built house should not be presented as a durable solution when it increases travel costs, lacks secure tenure, or remains exposed to the same hazard.

Visual and verbal representation requires care. Before-and-after images can document change, but repeated images of damaged possessions, distressed children, or intimate domestic spaces may turn hardship into spectacle. The person receiving support should be able to decline an interview or restrict what is shown. Journalists should seek comment from beneficiaries about suitability and remaining needs, not only gratitude. Follow-up after several months can assess occupancy, repair quality, household costs, safety, and whether the family's housing situation has become more stable. This long horizon is the defining feature of constructive housing coverage.

3.2.2. Scholarships

Scholarship coverage usually operates within a clearer timetable than housing coverage. Application openings, document deadlines, examination results, award announcements, and renewal decisions create predictable reporting opportunities. Yet the standard news format often concentrates on award ceremonies and exceptional students. This can make scholarships

appear accessible while hiding the information, administrative, and confidence barriers that prevent eligible students from applying.

In Viet Nam, Decree No. 238/2025/ND-CP governs tuition-related exemptions, reductions, and study-cost support [22]. These measures are distinct from individual scholarship programs, but the overlap matters to reporting because students may need to distinguish state entitlements from charitable awards. A provincial newsroom should verify the applicable scheme before presenting an application route.

Research on financial aid shows that clear information and timely communication matter, but information alone does not always overcome complex barriers. Large-scale studies of messaging and nudges report mixed effects, indicating that reminders work differently depending on students' circumstances and available support [23, 24]. Research in Central Java similarly found that low-income students' expectations, knowledge, and attitudes influence their intention to apply for financial aid [25]. Constructive scholarship journalism should therefore move beyond announcing opportunities. It should explain eligibility in plain language, provide an application timeline, identify required documents, clarify whether costs are fully covered, and describe where applicants can receive help.

The response mechanism also needs examination. A scholarship may reduce tuition but leave transport, accommodation, equipment, or digital-access costs unresolved. Renewal conditions may be difficult for students balancing work and study. Evidence on the loss of grant aid indicates that reduced or withdrawn support can harm persistence and completion [26]. Journalists should thus ask how recipients are selected, whether rural and disadvantaged applicants can complete the process, how appeals are handled, and what academic or mentoring support accompanies the award.

Beneficiary protection is especially important when students are minors or when stories disclose family poverty. Consent should not be assumed from participation in a ceremony. A constructive profile can describe effort and aspiration without publishing unnecessary financial, health, or family details. Follow-up should examine whether recipients enrolled, remained in study, completed required stages, and received the promised support on time. Coverage should also include eligible non-applicants and unsuccessful applicants, since their experiences reveal barriers that winner-centred stories cannot show.

One documented newsroom-led example is the "Chắp cánh ước mơ" scholarship program described by Đồng Tháp journalists Phi Công and Thu Hoài (2026). Their report identifies the collaborating sponsor, selection priorities, and awards, while also presenting detailed personal accounts. It illustrates why editorial reporting on a newsroom-supported award should distinguish independently verified program results from the organizers' account and apply particular care to the disclosure of minors' private circumstances.

3.2.3. Healthcare access

Inaccurate healthcare reporting can expose audiences to direct risks when it influences decisions about treatment or access to services. A story about a promising treatment, screening program, charity clinic, or patient recovery may encourage action, but it may also create false expectations, delay appropriate care, or direct people toward an unsuitable service. For that reason, healthcare claims warrant specialized verification beyond the checks ordinarily applied to a human-interest narrative. Recent review research describes health journalism as an interdisciplinary field in which accuracy, evidence interpretation, professional sourcing, and public understanding remain central concerns [27].

A constructive healthcare story should separate the patient narrative from evidence about the intervention. One successful case cannot establish effectiveness. Reporters should consult appropriately qualified and, where possible, independent health professionals; identify the source and quality of evidence; explain uncertainty; and state who may not benefit. Costs,

referral requirements, waiting times, geographic access, and alternatives should be included. During public health emergencies, credible, timely, accessible, and actionable communication is part of effective response, while community engagement helps authorities and service providers understand concerns and barriers [28, 29].

Vietnamese health-insurance access also has a defined legislative context: Law No. 51/2024/QH15 amended the Health Insurance Law, and Decree No. 188/2025/ND-CP specifies implementation provisions [30, 31]. A service-oriented report should therefore check current eligibility, referral and payment information against the responsible health authority rather than infer rules from an individual patient account.

Constructive pandemic reporting illustrates both value and risk. Studies found that response-oriented coverage could support efficacy and reduce some negative effects of crisis news, but it still required careful role performance and evidence [32, 33, 34]. The lesson applies beyond pandemics. Hope should arise from a verified pathway, not from certainty that the evidence does not support. Terms such as “breakthrough,” “cure,” or “guaranteed” should be avoided unless they accurately reflect a strong professional consensus.

Patient dignity and confidentiality are equally important. Consent to treatment is not consent to publicity. Reporters should consider whether a person can freely refuse, especially when assistance is linked to a media appeal. Identifying details, diagnoses, images, and family information should be limited to what is necessary. Follow-up should assess whether the patient reached care, whether promised funds or services were delivered, whether costs remained, and whether the story produced unintended exposure or stigma. Corrections must be rapid and visible because outdated health information can remain searchable and continue to influence decisions.

3.2.4. Emergency assistance

Emergency assistance differs from the other domains because reporting and response occur under severe time pressure. Needs, access routes, weather conditions, shelter locations, and service availability can change within hours. The first constructive responsibility is therefore not to add optimism but to provide verified, actionable information. Reports should distinguish confirmed facts from preliminary information, state the time of the latest update, and identify the responsible source. They should tell audiences what action is safe, where help is available, which channels are official, and what information remains uncertain.

Journalists covering disasters also work under physical and psychological strain. Research on disaster coverage documents difficult working conditions and the potential mental-health burden for reporters [35]. Newsroom protocols should therefore address staff safety, assignment rotation, communication, and post-assignment support. Trauma-informed practice is also necessary when interviewing affected people. Guidance for journalists recommends informed, non-coercive interviewing, careful language, and restraint in the use of distressing details or images [36].

The response itself should be reported as a changing system. Early stories may focus on rescue, shelter, food, water, medicine, and cash. Later stories should examine beneficiary lists, delivery delays, duplication, neglected locations, complaint channels, and the transition from relief to recovery. Vietnam’s recent work on shock-responsive social protection highlights the need for timely, predictable, and scalable support, while also noting operational, delivery, and financing constraints [37]. Journalism can make these system questions visible without obstructing emergency operations.

Decree No. 20/2021/ND-CP sets out social assistance policies in Viet Nam, including provisions relevant to extraordinary assistance; it has been amended, so reporters must check the consolidated requirements applicable at the time of publication [38]. The need to

distinguish immediate relief from longer-term recovery is especially important when floods or riverbank erosion displace households and also affect health, schooling, and livelihoods.

Constructive emergency reporting should also manage offers of help. Publishing unverified bank accounts, donation requests, or supply lists can create fraud, congestion, or inappropriate donations. A newsroom should verify the collecting organization, purpose, authorization, update process, and reporting of receipts and expenditures. It should protect the location of vulnerable people when disclosure may create safety risks. Follow-up should continue after the dramatic phase, examining housing, schooling, healthcare, livelihoods, documentation, and the distribution of recovery support. In this domain, constructive journalism is best understood as accurate guidance plus sustained accountability.

For example, a 2025 report in Báo Cần Thơ described a riverbank erosion incident in Thới Lai that destroyed a home and included local warnings about risk and relocation [39]. This published account confirms that provincial news coverage can combine an incident report with safety guidance. It does not establish whether promised assistance subsequently reached the household; that question would require separate follow-up evidence.

3.3. A five-step model for provincial converged newsrooms in the Mekong Delta

The comparison leads to a proposed five-step editorial workflow for provincial converged newspaper, radio, television, and digital news organizations in the Mekong Delta. Figure 1 presents the sequence. It is a normative model derived from the comparative review, not an observed or validated newsroom process.

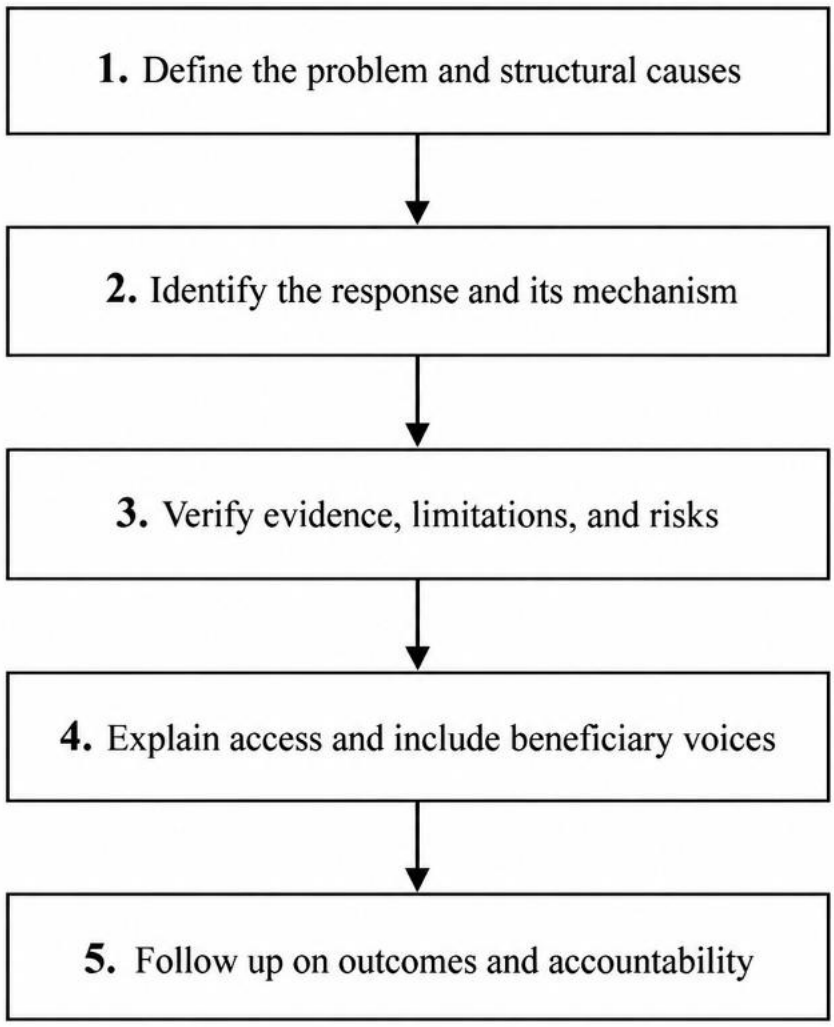

Figure 1. Proposed five-step workflow for constructive social welfare reporting

Step 1: Define the problem and its structural causes. The newsroom begins with the immediate case but builds a short evidence file on scale, location, affected groups, policy responsibility, and known causes. For recurring issues, the file should use local administrative data, community organizations, professional sources, and prior reporting. This step prevents a story from presenting hardship as personal misfortune alone.

Step 2: Identify the response and explain its mechanism. Reporters specify what the program actually provides, who delivers it, how people enter it, how decisions are made, and what change is expected. A response is described as a process, not a slogan. For media-supported programs, editorial coverage and fundraising administration should be separated so that journalistic judgment is not determined by donor visibility.

Step 3: Test evidence, limits, and risks. The newsroom verifies claims with independent or professionally qualified sources and asks who may be excluded. Evidence standards should vary by domain: engineering and tenure checks for housing, selection and renewal data for scholarships, clinical evidence for healthcare, and operational confirmation for emergencies. Limitations should appear in the main story, not in a minor note.

Step 4: Provide an access pathway and dignified voices. Every service-oriented package should include dated and verified information on eligibility, documents, deadlines, locations, costs, contacts, and complaints. Television and video can show procedures; radio can reach audiences with limited connectivity; digital cards can support sharing; print and

long-form digital stories can explain systems. Beneficiaries should be represented as sources with agency, while consent and privacy choices are recorded.

Step 5: Follow up and publish accountability findings. A shared newsroom tracker records the promised action, responsible organization, expected date, beneficiary consent conditions, and follow-up schedule. Follow-up indicators differ by domain but should include access, timeliness, unresolved need, and outcome. The newsroom should report both progress and failure, update service information, and correct errors across all platforms.

Implementation requires modest, consistent infrastructure: a verified welfare directory with version dates and responsible staff; a cross-department desk linking public affairs, education, health, environment, and district reporters; a source matrix that reduces dependence on one official voice; and a follow-up calendar that turns isolated charity stories into continuing public-service beats.

The workflow should be adapted to the capacities and editorial responsibilities of each newsroom. A small provincial unit could begin with an assigned editor, a dated contact list, a simple verification log, and a shared follow-up schedule, rather than create a new department. The appropriate division of duties, verification costs, accessibility needs, and complaint-handling arrangements should be assessed through local newsroom interviews or pilot implementation.

Editorial accountability must be understood within Viet Nam's institutional framework. The 2016 Press Law governed the earlier period, but Press Law No. 126/2025/QH15 took effect on 1 July 2026 and superseded it [40]. Provincial newsrooms operate with a managing organization and legally defined editorial responsibilities. Accordingly, the proposed separation between editorial decisions and newsroom-supported fundraising is an internal governance arrangement to be approved by the editor-in-chief and managing organization, not a claim that the newsroom is institutionally independent of its supervising body. Where a newsroom organizes aid, it should clearly identify the collecting entity, the program rules and reporting responsibilities, and disclose verified receipt-and-expenditure summaries to the extent permitted by applicable law and arrangements. Complaints can be directed to a designated editor or administrative contact other than the reporter, with safeguards for personal data. Comparable verification questions should be put to state agencies, businesses, charities, and newsroom-managed programs, while recognizing their different mandates and disclosure obligations.

Evaluation should also be realistic. Page views and donations show attention, not necessarily welfare improvement. A provincial newsroom can use a small set of indicators: verified inquiries generated by a story, completed applications, identified information errors, response times, geographic reach, unresolved complaints, and outcomes documented through follow-up. Audience research suggests that constructive techniques can support emotion and efficacy, but their effects depend on topic, interest, design, and context [6, 10, 41, 42]. Newsroom evaluation should therefore combine audience measures with evidence about service access and accountability.

Evidence from audience experiments conducted outside Viet Nam cannot be assumed to predict trust, comprehension, or service uptake in the Mekong Delta. A future pilot should compare published stories and follow-up records before and after implementation, document the resources required, and seek feedback from journalists, service providers, and affected readers. Without such assessment, improved welfare outcomes remain an expectation rather than an observed effect.

4. Conclusion

Constructive journalism provides a stronger basis for social welfare reporting when it is understood as rigorous response reporting rather than positive news. Across housing,

scholarships, healthcare, and emergency assistance, the common tasks are to explain structural causes, investigate the response, test evidence, include beneficiaries with dignity, provide verified access information, state limitations, and return to the story. The comparison also shows that one format cannot serve every domain. Housing requires a long-term and place-based assessment; scholarship reporting must reduce informational and administrative barriers; healthcare demands the strictest evidence and privacy standards; and emergency assistance requires rapid, actionable, trauma-informed communication followed by recovery accountability.

For provincial converged news organizations in the Mekong Delta, the five-step model connects print, radio, television, digital production, and community relationships. Its value lies not in a separate "positive news" section but in stronger questions, sourcing, verification, service information, and follow-up. Whether the model improves reporting quality, service access, or accountability must be tested with provincial newsroom and audience evidence before its effectiveness can be established.

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