

**THE MEDIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
ISSUES FROM THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL QUESTION**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The role of the media in addressing issues of national question through remains a critical issue among developing nations such as Nigeria. Its critical role in the development of nations has grown over the decades to constitute an unavoidable subject of discourse in societies' journey through civilization mostly in contemporary times when most developing nations such as Nigeria, are facing multiple challenges. This realm of society has come through the ages of anti-colonial struggle to the independence and post independence military rule and other anti-democratic processes to become defenders of the rule of law, justice and equity in Nigeria. The media in Nigeria have been adjudged variously by observers and commentators on Nigerian development. Prominent among such observations include the findings of this study which reveal various dimensions to the interpretations of the role of the media in Nigeria's national development. Here the analysis reveals the Nigerian media as having contributed a very high quota of service to Nigeria's national development. These efforts are evidenced from the dividends of democracy which stand as lasting testimonies of the role the media have played and continue to play in Nigeria's national development. It therefore becomes of great importance for social science scholars, nationalists and other concerned citizens to join the media as they continue this task of society building.*

**Introduction**

The media have come over ages to constitute un-avoidable institutions of society's advancement. They have remained not just the watch dogs of society, but also stake holders in the development projects of nations, in many spheres of life, especially as agents of mass education.

According to Appadorai, (1975), the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century led to increased revival of learning, as men took to thinking for themselves against the previous centuries of mostly the dark ages of restraint of the human mind.

He continued that this era arising from the renaissance as well as the reform movements facilitated the invention of printing that helped record and spread discoveries and events, across frontiers. By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment, printing had formed the basic channel for the spread of information across societies that natural frontiers were breached facilitating the rapid transfer and diffusion of knowledge among mankind. Out

of these events emerged various institutions of society which began to assume specific fundamental importance and thus were given acronyms and definitions accordingly. Among these institutions was the mass media that assume the position of the “fourth estate of the realm” (Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 14 1976). The media have since its emergence played roles that have advanced society through the instrumentality of communication in varying degrees. The word media “is a derivative of the Latin word “medium” which means “path/or “way” and “means”. The adaptation of the media into the field of mass communication is in the plural form, “media, to denote the multiplicity of the various forms and channels employed in the art of communicating within society, which involves dealing with a mass or large number of people in their different categories (Igwe (2005).

Defleur and Dennis, (1975), conceive of the mass media as “devices for moving message across distances and time to accomplish the goals of communication”. There are many channels of the mass media. These include the newspapers (and newsletters), magazines, (and journals), film documentaries, radio, televisions, books as well as direct mail communications among others. All these are categorized into two viz;

1. The print (Press) media that include newspapers, magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, journals, books, directories, directional circulars bill boards, sky writing and other technical devices that appeal specifically to the sense of sight of the masses as well as still pictures and cartoons etc.
2. the electronic media include:
  - (a) Radio; i.e. audio message received from the air waves, audio recordings, public address systems and
  - (b) Television i.e. motion pictures received through the airwaves, video and cinema recordings and the latest ICT networks system. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1976: 21).

Message is invariably the central element in any art of communication.

It is therefore in the effort to underscore the implications of the role of the media in society that we seek to examine the media in Nigeria, to systematize and analyze its role as a catalyst to the development of Nigeria.

### **The Media**

As had earlier been mentioned at the introductory stage of this paper, the media have come to play very important roles for society. The media therefore are the means of communicating with large numbers of people across distances and time through the print and electronic channels. The media has thus come through various processes and centuries along with the forces of industrialization in both the developed and underdeveloped societies (Encyclopedia Britannica vol. 21. 1976).

Forester (1964) lends a voice in this spot light on the media when he takes an over view of the phenomena and holds that historically, the growth of the media in most societies have been tedious and painstaking. The circumstances under which the media have operated depended to a large extent on the level of civilization the given society has attained, as well as the prevalent political and socio-economic order that goes a long way to determine the trajectory of events in such societies. Here the ideological posture of a society pre-disposes it towards a particular behavior regarding its media.

In Europe and the Americas, the growth of the media came through travails that the quest for press freedom became the arrowhead of all other activities of the media. Media practitioners were initially of the print media called the press before the emergence of other sectors and channels in the pursuit of the same noble task, hence we see both press and media as the same in this paper.

Zachariah, (1946) argues that; despite these efforts and after the demise of the medieval order, the modern state arose and sustained the press censorship that it continued to constitute contentious issue between the government and the practitioners of this fourth estate of the realm. Among censorship mechanism employed by the British government to censor the press within both its territories and their colonies which the post colonial Nigerian state has sustained include: Licensing and forbidding any press work and sales without government approval. This order met with consistent criticism and antagonism that culminated in the emergence of the work of John Milton, an English poet, “Areopagitica”, in which he called for the stoppage of government caging of the press. He campaigned for the right and freedom to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience. His efforts in conjunction with other scholars and those of the press led to the 1695 discontinuation of licensing of the press in England. (Zachariah1946).

Other restrictions such as the law of seditious libel, etc continued and were faced with struggles to set the press on a better footing for the dissemination of information in society. In America such struggles took various dimensions that culminated in the 1935 trial of Job Peter Zenger, a New York editor accused of seditious libel for criticizing the colonial Governor, he was acquitted by the Jury, when his lawyer invoked the ethical order of ‘the right to print matters supported with truth’ in his defense, (Encyclopedia Americana, 1979).

On the international level, conflicts over press (media) freedom continued that in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly in adopting the universal declaration of human rights; enumerated the principle which held that;

very one has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media,

regardless of frontiers” (United Nations 1948 declarations. cited in Dashe, ed., (1995).

Despite the fact that all member nations are bound by this United Nation principles, many nation-states still operate laws that restrict the press through instrumentalities such as:-

- i. Government licensing of journalists.
- ii. Heavy taxation on equipments such as printing machines, papers, inks, etc (to curtail investments in the sector)
- iii. Press council, designed to regulate, punish and even withdraw licenses of “erring” practitioners.
- iv. Cases of libel for obscene publications that elicit negative consequences through literary and artistic publications as well as emotive issues in political, religious and cultural life of society that leads to tension and crisis, (Egwu, ed. 2003).

In the third world countries in general and Nigeria in particular the media have remained the paradox in which circumstantial inclinations of both the government under different regimes and the practitioners have each played the media to the gallery of particular interests in the society, by either caging press freedom or undermining the ethics of the profession through state patronage to repress freedom of expression.

The media served as a veritable instrument in the death knell on colonialism, which informed one of the early institutions that had effective spread in the particular case of Nigeria, in which its functions have continued to grow and elicit reactions from various quarters.

Specifically the functions of the media have come to include among others:

1. Political socialization and mobilization.
2. Surveillance over the environment and society.
3. Correlation of parts of society in response to the environment.
4. Transmission of the societies’ heritage from one generation to the next.
5. Entertainment, education and mass-communication related issues.
6. The duty of watchdog of society in all spheres of life. (Egwu . ed (2003).

### **Development**

Development is a complex phenomenon that involves many aspects of life. It ranges from the social and the political to the economic and other phases of the life of men as they interact with each other, nature and the society.

Development deals with motivating people towards improvement in their lives as well as the entire society. Here some form of profound transformation occurs from stages of

stagnation and decay to improved standard of life in a progressive manner that causes existence to appreciate positively.

Many definitions of development exist in the literature. Each scholar's ideological position determines the form of his interpretation of the phenomena. Among these are theories that range from the economic growth to the modernization theories, the distributive justice and the classical political economy theories of development, as well as the dependency theory.

For Keith, cited in Egwu (2005),

*...the ultimate purpose of development is to expand the capabilities of people, to increase their ability to lead long and healthy lives, to enable them to cultivate their talents and interests, and to afford them an opportunity to live in dignity and with self respect...*

Development, as posited by Keith, is a sine-qua-non-for the actualization or fulfillment of man's efforts as he interacts with matter and his fellow men.

The world summit for social development, held in Copenhagen 1995, concluded that poverty reduction and full employment should be crucial aims for developing countries. The summit recognized that a necessary condition to meet these objectives was an appreciable increase in the rates of growth experienced over the 1980s and 1990s in these countries. But it was implicitly acknowledged that economic growth is not in itself sufficient to achieve all the goals set by the summit. The quality of these growths also matters. (UNRISD 2000 publications)

Issues arise here to cause scholars like Osiruemu (2004) to argue that socio-economic development deals with the relationship between economic activity and social life. In many cases, socio-economists focus on the social impact of some sort of economic change, as a unit of analyses of development.

As communities continue to grow, local officials and community members are constantly challenged by the need to balance fiscal, social, economic and environmental goals. One aspect of this challenge is deciding how much and what type of new development the community can accommodate without compromising the day-to-day quality of life for citizens, through socio-economic development. Socio-economic development promotes long-term sustainability, including economic prosperity, a healthy community and social well-being. It also preserves the rural character of the community, by embracing improvement in the living standard of the citizenry, seeking to create a high level of employment, reduction of poverty, infrastructures and other essentials of life, (Egwu, 2005).

According to Onyemeluke, (1977), development in national context refers to the processes of change, particularly on infrastructure, superstructure, human dimensions targeted towards the enhancement of a people's socio-economic welfare and the average individual's scope for self-fulfillment.

On his part Nnoli, (1981), opines that development is not the collection of western artifacts with an index of how one is able to acquire industrialization, economic affluence, advanced technology, urbanization and democracy. Rather he sees it as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their environment to create general transformation of life from stages of stagnation and decay to an improved standard.

These entails among other things a more equal distribution of income, more and better paid job, more gender equality and more gender inclusiveness and other social security imperatives which governments must not only encourage but also must create in their societies. All these with their significant objectives spelt out point to people oriented processes of development that go beyond the lip services of the world and indeed Nigerian leaders.

Our contentions are located within the broad objectives spelt out by UNRISED (1991), which involves the promotion of international comparative studies that facilitate exchange of experiences. This is possible through the creation of greater national comparability that enhances sustainability on all fronts of life based on specific life patterns that encourage the improvement of the lives of all peoples.

In this order, we adopt as our guiding principle UNRISD's four broad aims of qualitative development indicators. These are:

1. To help orientate national development and support of international cooperation by assisting governments to formulate and follow policies better geared to the well being of the population.
2. To promote and evaluate progress among all peoples as they develop.
3. To promote the application of policies for the pursuit of concerted projects.
4. To provide early warnings regarding conditions that demand attention and action in the attainment of development goals. (UNRISD (1991).

### **The Media and National Development**

The media in Nigeria has come a long way through the colonial era under which it suffered repression and stiff opposition from the colonial administrators, till date to be celebrated despite the drawbacks that have been witnessed by its practitioners.

According to Rodney (1988:287)

...Colonialism fettered the development of the enslaved people. To facilitate colonial exploitation, the imperialists deliberately hampered economic and socio-cultural progress (socio-cultural progress here encapsulating the functions of the media in pursuing the people's socio-cultural development) in the colonies, preserved and restored obsolete form of social relations and fomented discord between the various nationalities, groups and sections of the society.

The indigenous media of colonial Nigeria were among the sections of the society that faced stiff opposition from the colonial order that an antagonism between it and the colonial state persisted leading to conflicts. Here the media became the vanguard for political independence and nationalist struggles, as a fusion of interests emerged between journalism and politics, within which every indigenous Nigerian politician became a potential journalist and vice versa. At this juncture there emerged a collaborative effort in the struggle for independence in which the media through the few available newspapers like the "West African Pilot" Iwe Iroyin" a Western Nigerian based newspaper, etc, engaged in the political education of Nigerians about the ills of colonial rule as well as the need for the people's support of the nationalist struggle (Nnoli 1978).

Under the colonial order the media was active as an agent of national development via, its collective and active enlightenment of the masses towards the opposition of the exploitative colonial masters as well as the quest for the people's liberation and self rule actualized on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960.

From the 1960 independence through the various Republics (civil rule) and Military Dictatorship, the media in Nigeria have undergone various processes of both horrendous and nostalgic dimensions.

The media have played great roles in some aspects of Nigeria's national development as agents of mass enlightenment against misrule and totalitarianism. The military rulers have all through their years of hegemony over the people of Nigeria declared an unofficial war on the media. Efforts were made to apply all forms of draconian decree and jungle justice against the media, because this was a major source of exposing the appropriation tactics of the military juntas that held the people hostage in their land. The media were so embattled that many such as Dele Giwa and others paid with their lives while pro-democracy activists such as Pa Rewane, Kudirat Abiola, and others who collaborated with the media to oppose military dictatorship paid the same painful price.

The media was therefore muscled to the point it became an unofficial practice for various political office holders under the military juntas, to turn the media into punching bags.

Nigeria being a nation-state whose political leadership psyche has difficulty in adjusting to change has without surprise to continued the same violent political behavior into the democratic dispensation that started in 1999 when the military disengaged from and relinquished political power, thanks to the media and international pressures.

It is therefore not surprising that the political cum democratic rulers have ganged up since 1999 till date to either loot the peoples' resources or seek to elongate and perpetuate their stay in office so that the brigandage will continue.

This, the media has continued to expose leading to the attempts to once again muscle the media. However, the media have maintained their ground that their voice continues to reverberate not just longer but louder, that the Obasanjo led civilian dictators bowed to the will of the masses; alas the entry of the Yar'Adu and Goodluck Jonathan led team, an indication that the media is still awake.

Thanks to the media and the relentless efforts of other well meaning Nigerians, this new team of civilian rulers led by President Jonathan has since its entry into political office began to adjust to the true meaning of their calling which is democratic rule. The media's unwavering hold to their pen have caused hope to rise like the early morning sun to soothe the people's hearts as they look forward to better days of sustainable democracy anchored on good governance.

### **Analysis**

National development is an historical and dialectical phenomenon. It is a desire of the various institutions and peoples that constitute the country; each imbued with various interests and goals, aspire to accomplish. Such goals have on many occasions had opposing forces rear their heads so high above the overall national interest that crisis and conflicts have resulted leading to diverse forms of assertiveness that threaten Nigeria's corporate existence.

Ita, (1978), in a reaction to sectional sentiments and the attendant consequences warns that the greatest need of Nigerians today is to become a community, to evolve a national selfhood and that Nigerians should seek coordination among the ethnic (and sectional) unions in a way that will help to build a strong national consciousness.

Here the consciousness of the people towards national development will involve a process of politically socializing the people into becoming good and patriotic citizens and making them feel they have a stake in the community worth fighting for. Here a sense of mutuality of interests and identities must be fostered among the multiple and diverse ethnic configurations. It is this consciousness building as well as exposing and

frowning at the ills of each society that the media's avowed role of pursuing uprightness without reverence to any sacred cows becomes obvious.

This researcher therefore submits that the media in Nigeria have come a long way in an antagonistic environment and generally debilitating socio-economic order to be identified as part of the institutions in Nigeria that competes with their peers in the committee of nations. They have grown from being professional organs into that which takes on all available human and societal development strides; on politics, the economy, socio-cultural issues etc; and have continued to break into new frontiers of the emerging globalization processes, (Egwu 2005).

Today in Nigeria, the media have come of age that they continue to watch the society exposing ills such as the celebrated sectional interests' intent on scuttling the visitation of the law on any erring Nigeria leaders and the followers.

The media have taken their position as the watch dog of the society as they continues to cover the young democracy, seeking for accountability, war against all social vices as well as calling on the society to look into the needs of the marginalized people such as the minorities of the Niger Delta, human rights abuses of the civil war, and others perpetrated by past military regimes, as well as present civilian despots.

We submit that the journey has been rough so far. The horizon is getting clearer with the media playing the leading role as well as calling society's attention to fundamental national issues. With caution and sustained effort against the ills of sectionalism, unfounded rumour mongering and witch hunting of any one or section of the country, the media will successfully occupy their proper place in Nigeria's quest for national development.

The effectiveness of the media's role in this aspect involves locating the concept of development within the ambits of efforts that can transform the people and society into positions of improved living standard as well as the transformation of the economic and infrastructural base for good life.

Development is about people and society moving in unity towards excellence, good life and order. It is a process of interaction between men and their environment being transformed in that process, for the creation of an egalitarian system for the benefit of all mankind.

The goals sought by this paper entail sustained education and information dissemination, unrestrained and unfettered; for the benefit of a class-less society. These are the goals of the media and this is the essence of national development. The media therefore has the

functional duty of ensuring that society does not decay into “nothingness”. They should keep their heads above waters in this noble task of ensuring the success of the people’s quest for development through the profound transformation of society involving changes in property relationship and access for various social classes to public good.

### **Conclusion**

This study has been an exposition of the role of the media in the national development efforts Nigerians. It is established here that indeed the media have come to stay as both the watchdogs of society and motivators of men in their efforts to cause development in their entire ways of life.

The media in Nigeria have lived up to their responsibility in all phases of nation building. The citizens have shown their appreciation of these roles of the media in various ways as have been stated in this study. However, much still remain to be done by all involved in the struggle by the people to sustain the dividends of democracy in not just the political institutions but also the economic and other areas of national life of the people.

To achieve the much desired accelerated development of the Nigerian society, the media’s role identified here and many more to be discovered elsewhere must be sustained. The media have indeed been effective and patriotic in their service to their mother land. The gentlemen and ladies of this fourth realm of the society are indeed heroes and heroines of the people that deserve all the citizens’ support as they sustain their avowed struggle for the sustenance of the nation’s development efforts.

### **Recommendations**

It is evident from this study that Nigerians have attained enviable heights in the various frontiers of human endeavor. Among such frontiers include the media whose efforts this researcher has painstakingly undertaken to study here.

Despite these successes, there are still some gray areas of set back and lapses on the part of both the media and the citizens deserving attention for greater heights to be achieved by the media in the Nigerian development efforts. These areas are hereby discussed as recommendations of this study. Such areas include:

- (1) The media should strengthen their members’ professionalism through periodic training and other services that can reposition them in the development of our society.
- (2) There must be concerted efforts at ensuring that only qualified journalists are engaged to practice the profession by the various media establishments, to avoid miss—information and other vices that may cause loss of faith in the media by the citizens. When the practice is left in the hands of the professionals, their effective service delivery to the nation can be guaranteed.

- (3) Contemporary efforts at sustaining the dividends of democracy in Nigeria must ensure the protection of journalists' rights. Here the rule of law must be ensured and guaranteed on behalf of both the people and the media practitioners.
- (4) All citizens must put their hands to the plough in the anti-corruption war by providing information to the media to help them bring unscrupulous public and private office holders to the public glare. This will facilitate the efforts of the long arms of the law at bringing such persons to book.
- (5) National development is a holistic affair deserving the total commitment of the citizenry irrespective of creed, profession and other affiliations. All efforts must therefore be put in place by the people to work in association with the media to achieve the task of nation building in Nigeria. Nigerians must therefore join forces with the media and all involved in the struggle to take the nation to higher heights.

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